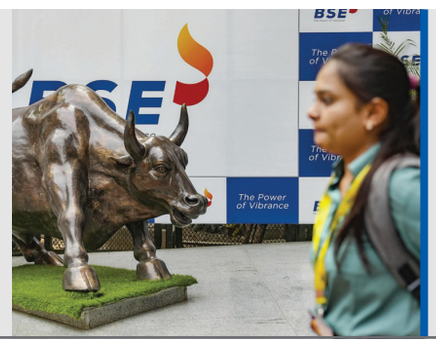
NATION
UP ramps up crowd mgmt measures at Maha Kumbh
≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS
Markets rally for 3rd day; Sensex up 226.85 points
≫ Page: 7 ≪



SPORTS
Karnataka 267/5 vs Haryana in must-win match
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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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MIDAIR COLLISION KILLS 64 IN US

Passenger jet collides with Army helicopter while landing just 5kms away from White House

ARLINGTON, 30 JAN

All 64 people aboard an American Airlines jet that collided with an Army helicopter were feared dead in what was likely to be the worst US aviation disaster in almost a quarter century, officials said on Thursday.

At least 28 bodies were pulled from the icy waters of the Potomac River after the mid-air collision Wednesday night when the helicopter apparently flew in the path of the jet as it was landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington, officials said.

Rescuers were still searching for any sign of the 60 passengers and four crew members, but they did not believe there were any survivors, which would make it the deadliest US air crash in nearly 24 years.

The body of the plane was found upside-down in three sections in waist-deep water. The wreckage of the helicopter was also found. Donnelly said first responders on Thursday were searching an area of the Potomac River as far south as the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, roughly 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) south of the airport.

Investigators will try to piece together the aircraft's final moments before the collision, including its contact with air traffic controllers as well as a loss of altitude by the passenger jet. —*PTI*

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WHAT HAPPENED?
A PSA Airlines jet (operating as American Airlines Flight 5342) collided mid-air with a US Army Black Hawk helicopter near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.
Time: 9PM, Wednesday.
Both aircraft crashed into the Potomac River.
Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport
Joint Base Anacostia Bolling
POSSIBLE CAUSES:
Communication Issues: Military and civilian aircraft use different air bands, which may have prevented the helicopter pilot from hearing warnings.
Pilot Focus: Pilot likely did not see the other aircraft while landing.
AIRCRAFT INVOLVED:
Passenger plane: Bombardier CRJ700, made in 2010
60 passengers and 4 crew members.
It departed from Wichita, Kansas, and was en route to Washington, DC.
HELICOPTER
Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk, (since 1970's)
3 soldiers on board
Why didn't the helicopter go up or down, or turn? Why didn't the control tower tell the helicopter what to do instead of asking if they saw the plane
—Donald Trump, US President
CASUALTIES AND RESCUE EFFORTS
At least 30 bodies fished out so far
PASSENGERS ON PLANE:
Figure skaters from the US and Russia were among the passengers.
Picture of: Russian figure skaters Yevgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, both former world champions, were reportedly on board.
NEXT STEP: AUTHORITIES WILL CONTINUE SEARCHING FOR SURVIVORS AND BODIES WHILE INVESTIGATING THE CAUSE OF THE COLLISION.

DESIGN: G VISHWANATHA

UP Cong MP Rakesh Rathore arrested in rape case

SITAPUR, 30 JAN

Congress MP Rakesh Rathore was arrested from his residence here in a rape case on Thursday, a day after the Allahabad High Court rejected his anticipatory bail plea. Rathore was addressing a press conference when Kotwali Nagar police reached his residence to take him into custody. An FIR was lodged against Rathore on 17 January on a complaint by a woman who accused him of repeatedly raping her over four years after promising to marry her. Authorities are continuing their probe into the matter. —*PTI*

Kumbh: 15 tents gutted as fire breaks out

PRAYAGRAJ, 30 JAN

Fire broke out at 15 tents erected in an open area in Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh on Thursday. No casualties were reported in the incident, officials said. "We got information about a fire in 15 tents. Taking immediate action, the fire was brought under control and doused," UP Fire Department official Pramod Sharma said. The fire comes after the Uttar Pradesh government ramped up efforts to ensure crowd management and safety following the stampede where at least 30 people died. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2 & 4

3 die of suspected GBS in Bengal in four days

KOLKATA, 30 JAN

Three people, including a child, have died due to suspected Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) in West Bengal in the past few days, though the state health department is yet to officially confirm the cause of the deaths. All three people died in government hospitals in Kolkata and Hooghly district. Family members of the three claimed that they died of suspected GBS, an immunological nerve disorder. Meanwhile, four more children suffering from suspected GB syndrome were undergoing treatment at the BC Roy Hospital and Institute of Child Health, the sources said. —*PTI*

>>>More on page 4

Suburban Project to decongest City gets K'taka Cabinet nod

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Karnataka cabinet on Thursday approved the Greater Bengaluru Integrated Suburban project to develop Devanahalli, Nelamangala, Hoskote, Doddaballapur, Magadi and Bidadi as satellite townships around Bengaluru city and provide them with road and rail connectivity.

The decision was taken to decongest Bengaluru City, which is bursting at its seams, Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil briefed reporters after the cabinet meeting.

The cabinet has approved the implementation of the project in a total of 10 villages of Ramanagara district, namely Bairamangala, Bannigere in Bidadi Hobli, Hosur, KG Gollarapalya, Kanchugaranahalli, Aralalusandra, Kempaianapalya, Kanchugaranahalli Kavalu, Mandalahalli and Vaderahalli in Harohalli Hobli by the Greater Bengaluru Development Authority.

PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE

The towns of Devanahalli, Nelamangala, Hoskote, Doddaballapura, Magadi and Bidadi around Bengaluru will be developed as satellite townships with road and rail connectivity, a cabinet note said.

The cabinet also gave its nod to constitute a committee under the chairmanship of Additional Chief Secretary to the government comprising the competent authority, departments and institutions for the implementation of integrated suburban projects.

Approval has also been given to appoint a qualified firm to design and plan the township in the Work-Live-Play concept as per international standards by calling for global tender, the note said. —*PTI*

CHANDIGARH MAYOR POLL: BJP SECURES WIN

CHANDIGARH, 30 JAN

The BJP on Thursday won the post of mayor while Congress candidates, backed by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), bagged the senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor posts in the high-stakes Chandigarh mayoral elections.

The contest was between the BJP and the Congress–AAP combine.

The AAP was fighting for the post of mayor while the Congress was contesting for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor.

The BJP's Harpreet Kaur Babla was elected as the new mayor of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation after she defeated AAP-nominee Prem Lata. Babla secured 19 votes while Lata got 17 votes.

Presiding officer Ramneek Singh Bedi announced the results.

Congress nominee Taruna Mehta was elected deputy mayor, defeating BJP contestant Lakhbir Singh Billu. Mehta got 19 while Billu secured 17 votes. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

EC raids Mann's home ahead of Delhi polls

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday claimed that a team of the Election Commission officials reached Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's Kapurthala House residence in Delhi for search.

A team of the Election Commission (EC) officials was present at Mann's Kapurthala House to conduct a search at the premises, the AAP said in a statement.

An official outside Kapurthala House on Copernicus Marg here told reporters that a complaint was received regarding "cash" being distributed from there.

The team was awaiting permission to conduct the search, he added.

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi in a post on X hit out at the BJP, saying a team was at her Punjab counterpart's residence for "raid".

She alleged that people in the BJP were "openly" distributing money, shoes, slippers and bed sheets, but the police was unable to see that and reached an elected chief minister's residence for "raid".

A senior officer said that Delhi Police personnel were accompanying the Election Commission officials and members of the flying squad for protection.

The development comes a day after a private vehicle bearing the "Punjab government" sticker and registration number of the state was seized by the Delhi Police.

Delhi Police has registered a case after the vehicle parked near the Punjab Bhawan was found loaded with liquor, cash and election publicity materials of the AAP.

In a post on X, Mann also alleged that the EC was not seeing "open distribution" of money by the BJP in the run-up to the Delhi polls and was trying to raid his residence instead. —*PTI*

Bhagwant Mann PHOTO: PTI

- An official outside Kapurthala House on Copernicus Marg here told reporters that a complaint was received regarding "cash" being distributed from there

Don't confuse ammonia in Yamuna with poison: EC

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Election Commission on Thursday asked AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal not to mix the issue of increased ammonia in Yamuna with his allegation of river poisoning, and gave him a fresh opportunity to explain his charges against the Haryana government.

Not satisfied with his reply, the EC asked him to provide factual evidence with specific and pointed response to type, quantity, nature and manner of poisoning of Yamuna.

He was also asked to share details of engineers, location and methodology of detecting the "poison" by Delhi Jal Board staff by Friday 11 am, failing which the Commission will be free to take appropriate decision in the matter.

Kejriwal had on Wednesday responded to the Election Commission notice over his claim the Haryana government was "mixing poison" in Yamuna, and said raw water received from the BJP-ruled state in the recent past has been "highly contaminated and extremely poisonous" for human health.

In the 14-page reply to the EC, the former Delhi chief minister said if such "toxic water" is allowed to be consumed by people, it would lead to grave health hazard and fatality. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Arvind Kejriwal PHOTO: PTI

Bill on immigration among 16 to be tabled today

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The government is likely to introduce a bill in Parliament for streamlining various services related to immigration and foreigners, including their entry, exit and stay in the country, sources said.

The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, is expected to be introduced in upcoming Budget Session by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

The legislation is aimed at streamlining various services related to immigration and foreigners, including their entry, exit and stay in India, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the government on Thursday convened a meeting of floor leaders of all political parties ahead of the Budget session of Parliament. The session commences on 31 January with the address of the president to the joint sitting of the two Houses. Union Budget will be presented on 1 February.

In total, 16 Bills have been prioritised for this session such as Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 and Railways (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

—*Salar news with agencies*

>>>More on Page 7

FOR DEFENDING FREE SPEECH

Musk nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

Elon Musk, billionaire entrepreneur and head of the Department of Government Efficiency for the United States, has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 2025. The nomination, confirmed by European Parliament member Branko Grims, was submitted to the Norwegian Nobel Committee in recognition of Musk's contributions to defending free speech and human rights.

Grims shared the news on his Facebook page, highlighting Musk's efforts to promote these causes. Musk, known as the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX and the owner of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), has been a vocal advocate for free speech, particularly following his acquisition of X.

He emphasised his commitment to free speech during the acquisition, stating that it meant "that which matches the law."

Musk has further intensified his calls for free speech, with X's platform now embodying this principle. His stance on the matter remains evident in his social media posts, such as a recent comment on 21 January, when he called the Chancellor of Germany "Oaf Schitz" in response to the leader's remarks on free speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

- The deadline for nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize is 1 February, with the winners set to be announced in October

The deadline for nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize is 1 February, with the winners set to be announced in October.

The Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony will take place on 10 December in Oslo, where laureates receive Nobel Prize medal, diploma, and a document confirming prize amount.

—*Agencies*

Faulty battery likely caused fire in City

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Authorities investigating the fire mishap at a parking lot in Jakkarayanakere, said that a faulty vehicle battery may have caused an explosion that ignited the blaze. The fire had destroyed over 146 seized vehicles on Wednesday. A police official from the Sheshadripuram Police Station confirmed that approximately 2,500 vehicles were parked in the lot, which is located within the police station's jurisdiction. The vehicles had been confiscated in connection with various traffic offences and were being stored at the site. "The exact cause of the fire can only be confirmed once we receive the detailed report from the Forensic Science Laboratory". *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

4 sentenced to death in Gadag honour killing case

GADAG, 30 JAN

A district court has sentenced four individuals to death for the honour killing of a young couple in 2019. Ramesh Madara, 29, and Gangamma Madara, 23, from Lakkalakatti village, were murdered on 6 November 2019, following their marriage that defied Gangamma's family's wishes. The convicted are Shivappa Rathod, Ravikumara Rathod, Ramesh Rathod, and Parasurama Rathod, all relatives of the victim. The couple's tragic love story took a violent turn as Gangamma's family opposed their union, particularly due to Ramesh's Dalit background. The Gajendragada police investigated the brutal killings, filing charges of murder and criminal intimidation under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The couple leaves behind two children. *—PTI*

15-year-old girl ends life in City

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

A 15-year-old girl allegedly took her own life by hanging herself at her residence in Srinagar in the city. The deceased was identified as Bhoomika, a class 10 student. Hanumanthnagar police said that the matter came to light on Thursday morning after her parents went to her room and were concerned by the lack of response. Bhoomika had dinner with her parents the previous night had locked her bedroom door from the inside. The parents found her hanging from the ceiling fan the next morning. The family immediately alerted the police. The reason behind the extreme step remains unclear as of now. *—Salar News*

(Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

Yadgir panchayat member charged with casteist slur

YADGIR, 30 JAN

A case has been filed against Basannagouda Kenchareddy, a member of the Gram Panchayat, for allegedly hurling casteist slurs at Nirmala Harish Don, the head teacher of Government Higher Primary School in Bachimatti, Yadgir district. The incident reportedly occurred on 26 January, during the 76th Republic Day celebrations, when Kenchareddy verbally abused Don, who had prominent Dalit community leaders seated alongside village leaders at the event. An audio recording of the alleged exchange has subsequently gone viral on social media. Don has formally lodged a complaint at Surapura police station, claiming she was subjected to caste-based harassment and death threats. She has requested protection for herself and her family in light of the incident. *—Salar News*

2 more die by suicide over microfinance harassment

This time the victims were from Bengaluru & Mysuru

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Women from various self-help groups in Kalaburagi recently filed a police complaint regarding microfinance firms' harrasment **PHOTO: SALAR**

Rajajinagar police are investigating the tragic suicide of a 38-year-old man who allegedly took his own life due to harassment by private financiers in the city.

Arun, a resident of Prakash Nagar, 7th Main Road, was found hanging from an iron hook on the terrace wall of his house. The incident occurred on 23 January, but his family formally lodged a complaint on 29 January, accusing a private financier of relentless harassment.

According to the complaint filed by Arun's father, Devaraj, Arun had secured a Rs 5 lakh loan from a local financier, Dinesh, using his car as collateral.

On January 23, Arun reportedly sent his wife and children to his brother's house in Kengeri before taking the extreme step that night. When the family returned the following day, they found him hanging.

The police have registered a case and are interrogating the accused.

Notably, this incident occurred just two days after Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda stated that no cases of harassment by microfinancing firms had been reported in the city.

Meanwhile, a similar tragedy was reported in Mysuru, where a 37-year-old labourer, Subramanya, allegedly died by suicide after consuming poison at Bettadapura Basaveshwara Colony in Periyapatna taluk due to pressure from microfinance agents.

The incident took place on Thursday morning. According to the district police, Subramanya had borrowed Rs 5 lakh from HFCL Finance Agency, mortgaging his house. Additionally, he had taken hand loans from private money lenders. As he defaulted on his monthly payments, microfinance agents allegedly began pressuring him, even posting a seizure notice on his house.

Meanwhile Deputy Commissioner G Lakshmikanth Reddy cautioned that criminal cases will be filed against the agents, staff of micron financing agencies if the police, district administration receives complaints against them for harassing their borrowers over the issue of loan repayment. *—Salar News*

(Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

Screengrab from a video shows doctors operate using a phone light at GIMS Hospital in Kalaburagi **PHOTO: SALAR**

Docs use phone torch for surgery

KALABURAGI, 30 JAN

GIMS Hospital faced a power outage throughout the night, on Wednesday, forcing doctors to conduct medical procedures in the dim light of mobile phone torches.

The power failure affected the Mother and Child Department at the Gulbarga Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS). Despite the hospital being built at a cost of several crores, the backup inverter system failed to activate, leaving doctors and staff relying on their phone flashlights to continue their work.

Reports indicate that doctors were forced to perform a delivery under mobile torchlight. The lack of electricity also meant non-functional fans, leading to discomfort for newborns and postpartum mothers, who were exposed to mosquito bites. Relatives of the patients were compelled to provide their mobile torches to assist doctors and nurses.

Dr Shivakumar, the Medical Superintendent at GIMS Hospital, confirmed the power issue in the hospital's general department but reassured that the situation has since been resolved. .

GIMS Hospital has faced numerous controversies, including the abduction of newborns. *—Salar News*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of Martyrs Day at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Neither Godse nor others can kill Gandhi's values: CM

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said neither Nathuram Godse nor others can kill the values Mahatma Gandhi had left behind.

"On this day in 1948, a fanatic Nathuram Godse shot dead the Father of the Nation," Siddaramaiah told reporters after paying tribute to Gandhi.

"Gandhi was assassinated but his values cannot be killed – neither by Godse nor by others. Even today, his values are relevant in the country and the world." the Chief Minister said.

Regarding people from Belagavi killed in Prayagraj stampede, Siddaramaiah said the Deputy Commissioner will receive the bodies of the deceased persons, adding that he had no information about the rumoured eight other missing. "After receiving the bodies, the district in charge minister will announce the compensation to the families," the Chief Minister said.

The CM then turned to criticise certain political forces, saying, "Some anti-constitution, anti-federal system forces are trying to ruin the country. BJP and RSS are making statements that they will make the country one religion, one language, and one culture, which Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar opposed." *—PTI/ANI*

IN A RELIEF

HC stays SC/ST atrocities against Infosys' Kris

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

The Karnataka High Court has put a hold on the investigation and proceedings concerning an SC/ST atrocities case filed against Infosys co-founder Senapathy Kris Gopalakrishnan and 15 others. On Wednesday, Justice SR Krishna Kumar granted the stay.

The court confirmed that further proceedings will be suspended until the next hearing.

The case stems from allegations made by former Indian Institute of Science (IISc) professor Sanna Durgappa, who accused Gopalakrishnan and 17 faculty members of caste-based abuse spanning from 2010 to 2020. Durgappa, a member of the Bovi tribal community, claimed he was a victim of a fake honey trap scheme and faced derogatory remarks regarding his caste.

Commenting on the allegations, Gopalakrishnan expressed disappointment over the misuse of protective laws, asserting, "A law meant to protect marginalized communities has been misused to make false allegations against me." He emphasised his commitment to fairness and respect for all individuals, asserting that his affiliation with IISc as Chairman of the Council since 2022 demonstrates his integrity. Gopalakrishnan expressed confidence in the judicial system and the hope that justice will prevail. *—PTI*

Kris Gopalakrishnan. **PHOTO: INFOSYS**

- A law meant to protect marginalised communities has been misused to make false allegations against me

NCC K'taka-Goa wins PM's banner at R-day camp

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

The National Cadet Corps (NCC) Karnataka-Goa Directorate has been awarded the prestigious Prime Minister Banner 2025 at the Republic Day Camp 2025 held in New Delhi. The Prime Minister's banner was received by the Deputy Director General of NCC Directorate Karnataka and Goa, Air Commodore SB Arunkumar VSM during the PM's Rally.

"The state has been a consistent performer in all aspects of NCC as evident by the number of events won. NCC Directorate Karnataka & Goa stood first in Inter Directorate Shooting Championship, All India Vayu Sainik Camp, All India Thal Sainik Camp (Boys & Girls combined), and Yachting Regatta & RDC 2025, showcasing high standards consistency," a Defence Public Relations Officer said.

Air Commodore Arunkumar stated that being crowned the Champion Directorate this year was a reflection of the professionalism and hard work of the entire team. *—PTI*

ED points to money laundering in MUDA case

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

The fourteen sites (plots) allotted to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi B M in Mysuru upmarket were 'illegally allotted' and there was a money laundering attempt, reveals the ED investigation into the MUDA site allotment case.

The Provisional Attachment Order (PAO) issued by the Enforcement Directorate gave a detailed picture of the modus operandi to use these 14 sites for money laundering purpose.

Activist Snehamayi Krishna, who is a petitioner in the Mysuru Urban Development

Authority (MUDA) case shared the copy of PAO with PTI.

The 104-page order explained that the 'illegal allotment' was done under the influence. The ED said Parvathi returned these 14 sites subsequent to initiation of the investigation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.

"The illegal allotment of sites is not a single occurrence. There is a deep-rooted nexus between MUDA officers /officials and real estate businessmen/influential persons. Large number of illegal allotments were made by MUDA officers/officials against cash, immovable properties, vehicles etc," the ED said.

However, when confronted with the satellite imagery which clearly indicated development work on the land undertaken during year 2001, 2002 and 2003, he could not provide any plausible explanation for the same, the ED order said.

According to the ED, as per the final notification issued for acquisition of the land, Devaraju was not mentioned as land owner.

The ED investigation shows that the land was originally acquired by MUDA for Rs 3,24,700 and the same was illegally de-notified based on incorrect facts and under the influence.

The land was converted into residential land based on incorrect spot inspection reports and 'No Objection' from MUDA, according to ED *—PTI/ANI*

Congress hits back at BJP over internal rifts

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

Congress has launched a counterattack on BJP, which had been mocking the ruling party in Karnataka over alleged internal disagreements.

Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) spokesperson and former MLC Ramesh Babu criticised the Opposition party, alleging deep divisions within its ranks.

"The BJP in Karnataka is fractured and plagued by factionalism. Former CM DV Sadananda Gowda has compared the state BJP to a 'dry tree' and described dissenters as 'inauspicious crows' that should be eliminated. His remarks reveal the true nature of BJP leaders—mentally bankrupt, shaken by internal strife, and consumed by nepotism," Babu stated.

"If the BJP truly wishes to clean its house, then the immediate resignation of its state president, the opposition leader in the assembly, and the Opposition leader in the legislative council would be the first step. " Babu concluded. *—Salar News*

MAHA TRAGEDY

Bodies of 2 Kumbh pilgrims reach Belagavi for last rites

BELAGAVI, 30 JAN

Bodies of two devotees who died in the stampede at the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela have been handed over to their respective families after their mortal remains arrived at the Belagavi airport on Thursday evening, officials said.

The bodies of Aruna Khorpad, 61, and Mahadevi Hanamant Bavanur, 48, have been handed over to their families, they said.

The bodies of Jyoti Deepak Hattavar, 44, and her daughter Megha Deepak Hattavar, 24, whom will arrive in Belagavi by midnight, the officials said.

"The bodies of two individuals have already arrived at Belagavi airport and have been handed over to their families. The bodies of the remaining two have reached Goa airport and will be transported by road to Belagavi by midnight," a senior official from the revenue department said.

Speaking to reporters after the cabinet meeting at Vidhana Soudha, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda expressed condolences to the families of the deceased on behalf of the government.

"The government has already borne all the expenses incurred in sending the bodies of the deceased from Delhi to Belagavi. Will also provide appropriate compensation. However, no compensation is equal to the loss of life. The government sympathises with the families," he said. "Our officials are already in Delhi and are busy making all necessary arrangements for the tourists from Karnataka." *—PTI*

The mortal remains of two of four of Kumbh Mela stampede victims were received in Belagavi airport by the district administration and were handed over to their relatives in Belagavi on Thursday evening **PHOTO: SALAR**

State appoints 8 Information Commissioners

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

The Karnataka State government has appointed Ashit Mohan Prasad, a retired IPS officer, as the Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) of the Karnataka Information Commission (KIC). Along with Prasad, seven other officials have been appointed as Information Commissioners: Raman K, Dr Harish Kumar, Rudranna Harthikote, Narayan G Channal, Rajashekara S, Badruddin K, and retired IAS officer Dr Mamatha BR.

This decision follows reports highlighting that eight out of the ten positions at the KIC had been vacant for over a year. On average, each Information Commissioner is expected to handle 30 appeals daily. *—Salar News*

Yamuna row: Kejri accuses EC of politics

He said Congress and BJP are working together, putting the health of Delhi residents at risk

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

AAP Supremo Arvind Kejriwal Thursday accused Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar of engaging in politics by issuing him a notice over his claim that the Haryana government was "mixing poison" in the Yamuna.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal alleged that Kumar had "destroyed" the credibility of the Election Commission (EC) and was seeking a post-retirement position.

"No one has damaged the Election Commission the way Rajiv Kumar has done. If he wants, he can contest elections from any of the Delhi Assembly seats," the former chief minister said at the press conference.

Kejriwal's remarks came shortly after the EC expressed dissatisfaction with his response to its notice, and gave him another opportunity to clarify his accusations against the Haryana government.

Targeting the CEC, the AAP supremo said, "If you want to do politics, contest elections. He is eyeing a post-retirement job. No one has damaged the Election Commission as much as Rajiv Kumar has.

"I will not let the people of Delhi drink poisonous water as long as I am alive. I know they will arrest me in two days, but I am not afraid," he added. Kejriwal alleged the Congress and BJP have teamed up and were putting the health of Delhi's people in jeopardy. AAP leader Manish Sisodia, in a post on X, said, "The Yamuna water which had touched 7 ppm ammonia, which is poisonous for the human body, was being sent by the BJP government of Haryana to the people of Delhi."

"If the AAP raises its voice, you will file a case against it. I am willing to go to jail for the safety of the people of Delhi but will not compromise with the lives of the people."

Kejriwal responded to the EC's notice on Wednesday, stating that raw water received from Haryana in recent days had been "highly contaminated and extremely poisonous" to human health.

The AAP chief further challenged BJP leaders and Congress' Rahul Gandhi to drink Yamuna water containing 7 ppm ammonia, which he said had been bottled. —*PTI*

Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal dumps garbage outside Arvind Kejriwal's residence during a protest, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Cong overlooked Dalits, backwards in 90s, says Rahul

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Congress did not protect the interests of the Dalits and the backward community the way it should have in the 1990s, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said on Thursday.

Addressing a programme titled Vanchit Samaj: Dasha aur Disha organised by Dalit influencers in the national capital, Gandhi said, during Indira Gandhi's tenure, the Congress had full confidence of Dalits, minorities and backward community, but later in the 1990s, "there were shortcomings", and the fact is not lost on the party, Gandhi said.

"We would not talk just about representation. You talk about political representation and Kanshi Ram fought for political representation. But they have made political representation irrelevant. Lok Sabha BJP MPs, say they have made them a statue. The institutions, be it education or corporate India, judiciary, we have to get the share of power," he said. —*PTI*

STAR CAMPAIGNER

Union Home Minister Amit Shah with party candidate from Rohini constituency Vijender Gupta during in New Delhi on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

> **AAP-Da's blame game on Yamuna pollution exposes its inefficiency and failed governance. Instead of taking responsibility, AAP-Da government has started spreading fear among people**
>
> -JP Nadda, BJP Chief

> **Kejriwal is making excuses because he gave away the money meant for cleaning Yamuna to AAP's corruption. He is resorting to petty politics sensing defeat in the election**
>
> -Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

MARTYRS' DAY

President Droupadi Murmu pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi on Martyrs' Day, observed to mark the death anniversary of the father of the nation, at Rajghat, in New Delhi, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP defeats AAP in Chandigarh mayor poll

CHANDIGARH, 30 JAN

The BJP on Thursday won the post of mayor while Congress candidates, backed by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), bagged the senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor posts in the high-stakes Chandigarh mayoral elections.

The contest was between the BJP and the Congress–AAP combine. The AAP was fighting for the post of mayor while the Congress was contesting for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor.

The BJP's Harpreet Kaur Babla was elected as the new mayor of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation after she defeated AAP-nominee Prem Lata. Babla secured 19 votes while Lata got 17 votes.

Presiding officer Ramneek Singh Bedi announced the results.

Congress candidate Jasbir Singh Bunty won the post of senior deputy mayor, defeating BJP's Bimla Dubey. Bunty polled 19 while Dubey got 17 votes. Congress nominee Taruna Mehta was elected deputy mayor, defeating BJP contestant Lakhbir Singh Billu. Mehta got 19 while Billu secured 17 votes.

The victory of the BJP candidate in the elections for the post of mayor indicated that cross-voting took place during polling. In the 35-member house of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, AAP has 13 councillors and its ally Congress has six councillors. The BJP has a strength of 16 councillors. The Chandigarh MP also has a voting right as an ex-officio member. Manish Tewari is the sitting MP of the Congress. —*PTI*

Newly elected Chandigarh mayor Harpreet Kaur Babla (centre) with others in Chandigarh on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

Andhra govt clears 15 projects worth ₹44,776cr

AMARAVATI, 30 JAN

The State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) headed by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday approved 15 investment projects worth Rs 44,776 crore, which will create 19,580 jobs.

The new projects include a 1,500 MW facility and an 800 MW project by Navayuga Engineering at Gujjili in Alluri Sitarama Raju district and Chittamvalasa respectively, an official release said.

Navayuga Engineering will invest Rs 14,328 crore and create 3,450 jobs. Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd will invest Rs 10,300 crore at Kommuru in Annamayya district, providing employment to 3,000 people, the release said. Likewise, Anantapur Renewable Pvt Ltd will invest Rs 972 crore to set up a 178 MW wind power project at Anantapur, which will generate employment for 225 people. —*PTI*

India to seal Rafale-M, Scorpene deals with France

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

India is expected to seal in the next few weeks procurement of 26 naval variant of Rafale jets and three Scorpene submarines from France to further crank up its naval prowess, people familiar with the matter said on Thursday.

It is not immediately clear if the procurement will be announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris next month to attend a summit on artificial intelligence.

Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron are expected to hold bilateral talks on the sideline of the summit, being held on 10 and 11 February.

The people cited above said all the two deals are in the final stage of finalisation and that the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) will have to look at them.

In July 2023, the defence ministry approved the purchase of 22 Rafale (marine) jets from France, primarily for deployment on board the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

The Ministry had also cleared procurement of three Scorpene submarines from France. Under the Indian Navy's Project 75, six Scorpene submarines have been constructed in India by Mazagon Dock Limited in cooperation with the Naval Group of France. The Indian Air Force bought 36 Rafale fighter aircraft in fly-away condition. There is a thinking in the IAF that it should go for at least two more squadrons of the Rafale jets.

The defence and strategic ties between India and France have been on an upswing in the last few years. In July 2023, India and France announced a raft of ground-breaking defence works including development of jet and helicopter engines. —*PTI*

161 SERVICES

Andhra Pradesh IT Minister Nara Lokesh and others address media during Mana Mitra launch on Thursday. Powered by Mana Mitra, common people are expected to avoid the need to visit government offices multiple times for procuring documents **PHOTO: X**

Andhra launches 'WhatsApp governance'

AMARAVATI, 30 JAN

Andhra Pradesh government on Thursday launched WhatsApp governance platform 'Mana Mitra' (our friend) offering 161 citizen-centric services, enabling people to procure documents real-time with the touch of a button on their smartphones.

With Mana Mitra, which is available at the phone number 9552300009, people of the state can book a time slot to visit a temple, book an APSRTC bus ticket and download documents such as birth certificate and others.

Andhra Pradesh IT Minister Nara Lokesh formally launched the platform at Chief Minister's residence in Undavalli in Guntur district. Addressing a press conference during the event, the minister said, "We all believe it is a historical moment in governance initiatives. I believe that this is a true transformation that we are gonna achieve. This is what we call the Mana Mitra".

Hailing the citizen-friendly service, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu shared a short video about Mana Mitra in a post on X and recalled how the buzzword was e-governance in 1995 and WhatsApp governance 30 years later now.

Lokesh said Mana Mitra will offer seamless, efficient and citizen-centric public service delivery, adding that this initiative will catapult Andhra Pradesh again to the forefront of e-governance initiatives.

"We will be seeing more and more such initiatives coming. Our entire objective is to keep the citizen as (the) centre of our universe. What are all the touchpoints of the citizen and how do we resolve them," he said. Powered by Mana Mitra, common people are expected to save time and avoid the need to visit government offices multiple times for procuring documents. Lokesh questioned that why should people go to a government office or meet an MLA for obtaining basic documents. —*PTI*

Economy undeniably in slowdown: Congress

Rajya Sabha MP P Chidambaram and others during a press conference in New Delhi **PHOTO: SALAR**

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) and Rajya Sabha MP P. Chidambaram in the Real State of the Economy 2025 report said that country's economic status is largely overlooked or misrepresented by the government.

He pointed out that the government consistently presents a distorted version of the economy while neglecting key issues. He emphasised that the AICC report, developed by Professor Gowda's team—including Akash Satyawali, Sneha Elizabeth Koshy, Asmi Sharma, and Ishan Krishna—offers a fact-based perspective on the economic challenges that India faces.

The report reveals that youth unemployment is at a staggering 40 per cent, with the unemployment rate among graduates nearing 30 per cent.

The report highlights that wages, particularly in rural and agricultural sectors, have stagnated for the past four to five years. —*Salar News*

Search ops on in J&K's Poonch and Doda

MENDHAR/JAMMU, 30 JAN

Security forces on Thursday conducted searches following inputs about suspicious movement at different places in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch and Doda districts, police officials said. The operations are underway at Jadan Wali Gali, Sani Gali Mohalla, Nadan Wala in Gursai-Harni belt, Dharana Behir Rakh in Mendhar, Fazalabad Nar in Surankote and Chakrara Phatta in Mandi areas of Poonch and Dorhu and Basti and adjoining forest area in Bhaderwah area of Doda, the officials said. They said police and CRPF teams are conducting the operations launched between 9.40am and 10.45am after the police received information about suspicious movement of unidentified persons, believed to be terrorists. There was no contact with the suspiciously moving persons so far. —*PTI*

Guv Ravi hits out at Stalin over Gandhiji event

CHENNAI, 30 JAN

Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi on Thursday hit out at Chief Minister M K Stalin for conducting events 'in a corner of a city museum,' to honour Mahatma Gandhi's memory and alleged that the Father of the Nation was opposed and mocked during his life time by the followers of Dravidian ideology. In a strong reaction, the DMK government said Governor Ravi should recover from his "mental illness" of dictating terms by imagining himself to be a "monarch and zamindar," and rather than "politicising" the matter, he must foster harmony among the people. The tug of war between Governor Ravi and the DMK government over several issues is well known. —*PTI*

Vizhinjam port waiting for PM's date: Vasavan

KOTTAYAM, 30 JAN

The Kerala government on Thursday said that the Vizhinjam Port will be commissioned as soon as Prime Minister Narendra Modi gives a date. State Ports Minister VN Vasavan said the state has formally sought the Prime Minister's date for the commissioning. "The port will be commissioned as soon as we get the Prime Minister's date," he said. Vasavan said the Vizhinjam International Seaport project will be fully operational by 2028. "An agreement has been signed in this regard and the works have begun, and once functional, a significant share of the country's container shipment will be routed through Vizhinjam," Vasavan said. Vizhinjam port boasts a depth of 20 meters, allowing large ships to dock with ease, he added. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kerala LoP alleges Kavitha's role in brewery row

MALAPPURAM/ HYDERABAD, 30 JAN

Kerala's leader of Opposition in the Assembly and Congress leader VD Satheesan on Thursday alleged that BRS leader K Kavitha had visited Kerala in connection with the approval for a brewery unit in Palakkad, a charge dismissed by the former MP. Kavitha is the daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and an accused in the Delhi liquor policy scam. Satheesan alleged Kavitha "arrived in Kerala for the Oasis Commercial Private Limited Company" and demanded an investigation i. Satheesan stated that the decision to give permission to Oasis to set up "liquor manufacturing plants" was taken unilaterally by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Excise Minister M B Rajesh. "There are several mysterious deals behind the allocation of the brewery plant," he alleged. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Woman in Assam raped, acid poured in front of kids

SILCHAR, 30 JAN

A 30-year-old woman was allegedly raped in front of her two children, following which acid was poured on her, police said on Wednesday. The incident happened in the Dholai police station area in Assam's Cachar district. The accused, a 28-year-old driver, is a neighbour of the family. He barged into their house, raped her in front of her two children, poured acid on her and escaped, police said. After returning home, the husband found his wife's hands and legs tied. The incident happened on January 22 and a case was filed the next day, police said. —*PTI*

7 held over links with banned outfits in Manipur

IMPHAL, 30 JAN

Security forces in Manipur have apprehended seven individuals associated with banned organisations over the past two days. On Tuesday, three members of the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) and one active cadre from the United National Liberation Front-Koireng (UNLF-K) were detained near the India-Myanmar border in Tengnoupal district. The following day, police arrested two suspects linked to the proscribed Peoples' Liberation Army, who were reportedly involved in extortion activities at Paona Bazar in Imphal, where arms and ammunition were seized —*PTI*

HC lifts ₹2.5cr bail bond for coaching centre CEO

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Delhi High Court has overturned a trial court's order requiring Abhishek Gupta, CEO of Rau's IAS Study Circle, to deposit Rs 2.5 crore as a condition for interim bail following the drowning deaths of three students in July 2023. Justice Vikas Mahajan said the trial court should determine bail on its own merit. Gupta's counsel said the bail condition was excessive. Interim bail had been granted to a co-accused on a bond of Rs 1 lakh and two sureties, while the owners of the flooded basement were asked to deposit Rs 5 lakh with the Delhi State Legal Services Authority as a contribution. —*PTI*

RGI airport receives bogus bomb threat

HYDERABAD, 30 JAN

The RGI airport here received a bomb threat call but it was found to be hoax, police said on Thursday. A person called police dialing '100' on January 29 afternoon and gave a bomb threat. Appropriate measures were taken at the airport. An alert is already in force at the airport in view of Republic Day. The caller, a resident of Kamareddy district of Telangana, was mentally unsound, police added. —*PTI*

UP ramps up crowd mgmt measures at Maha Kumbh

Site declared no-vehicle zone day after stampede killed 30

PRAYAGRAJ, 30 JAN

A day after a stampede at the Maha Kumbh left 30 dead, the Uttar Pradesh government ramped up efforts to ensure crowd management and safety of devotees who continued to flock here in large numbers for the religious gathering.

The devotees braved the predawn chill and dense fog to take a dip in the Sangam and at other ghats here on Thursday.

More than 55.11 lakh devotees had taken the holy dip till 8 am, according to the Uttar Pradesh government.

Superintendent of Police (Traffic) Anshuman Mishra said the area would remain a no-vehicle zone until the crowd disperses completely.

"Vehicle passes will not be valid until all devotees have safely left for their destinations. No outside vehicles would be allowed to enter the city until the crowd exits the Mela area," the police officer said.

The senior police officer, however, said that senior officials may grant permission for vehicle entry based on the situation.

Mishra clarified that essential services such as police administration vehicles, ambulances and suction machines would be allowed entry as they are crucial for the smooth management of the Maha Kumbh.

Pilgrims, including women and children, were seen walking to and from the various ghats amid reduced visibility. Many had thin blankets covering their bodies while some stopped by bonfires along the routes to keep themselves warm.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh and Director General of Police Prashant Kumar are scheduled to reach here later in the day for a detailed probe into the stampede.

The top officers would also conduct a thorough review of the arrangements in the Mela area, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday night. —*PTI*

A policeman manages a crowd of devotees at Khusro Bagh near Prayagraj railway station as it moves towards the site of Maha Kumbh on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

PIL in SC seeks safety measures for devotees at Maha Kumbh

A PIL was filed on Thursday in the Supreme Court seeking specific guidelines to ensure safety of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh. The petition, filed under Article 32 of the Constitution by lawyer Vishal Tiwari, seeks to prevent incidents such as stampede and protect the fundamental rights of equality and life under Article 21. The plea, which made the Centre and all the states as parties, has sought a direction to the Centre and the state governments to jointly ensure the safety of the devotees. —*PTI*

DEADLY DISASTER

Slab collapses at JK Cement unit in MP; 4 killed

PANNA, 30 JAN

Four labourers were killed and 15 others injured on Thursday morning in a slab collapse at a JK Cement factory in Madhya Pradesh's Panna district, police said.

The incident took place at an under-construction unit of the factory near Amaanganj town, 350km from Bhopal, around 10am. "Four labourers including three from Bihar and one from Simaria police station limits (in Panna district) died. Fifteen others were injured," said Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Lalit Shakyawar.

Rescue operations, during which drones were used to inspect from above if any person was still trapped under the debris, were over, he said.

- Prima facie, the "shuttering" (scaffolding of planks supporting setting concrete) of a beam on the seventh floor suddenly gave in, leading to the incident

A probe was being carried out to ascertain the exact cause behind the incident and those found guilty will not be spared, Shakyawar said.

Prima facie, the "shuttering" (scaffolding of planks supporting setting concrete) of a beam on the seventh floor suddenly gave in, leading to the incident. The injured were sent to Katni for better treatment, the official added. —*PTI*

The debris at the site where a concrete slab collapsed on the premises of a JK Cement plant in Madhya Pradesh's Panna district **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PIXABAY

3 DIE OF SUSPECTED GBS IN BENGAL IN FOUR DAYS

KOLKATA, 30 JAN

Three individuals, including a ten-year-old boy, have succumbed to suspected Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) in West Bengal over recent days, although the state health department has yet to confirm the cause of death.

The deceased include Debkumar Sahu, 10, from Jagaddal in North 24 Parganas district; Aritra Manal, 17, from Amdanga in the same district; and a 48-year-old man from Dhaniakhali village in Hooghly district. All three died in government hospitals located in Kolkata and Hooghly.

A senior health official assured, "The situation in West Bengal is absolutely under control and there is nothing to panic about." Family members of the deceased have attributed the deaths to suspected GBS, an immunological nerve disorder.

Debkumar was treated at BC Roy Hospital, where he died on 26 January. Aritra passed away the following day at NRS Medical College and Hospital. The adult patient from Hooghly district died on Wednesday.

According to Govinda Sahu, Debkumar's uncle, the hospital reported that the boy's condition deteriorated during treatment. "They did not tell us the cause of his death was GBS, but the death certificate mentioned suspected GBS," he stated.

Currently, four more children with suspected GBS are receiving treatment at BC Roy Hospital and Institute of Child Health. GBS is a rare condition triggered by bacterial or viral infections that impair the immune system, leading to sudden muscle weakness and numbness. —*PTI*

SC orders relief for TN river pollution

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Supreme Court on Thursday issued a slew of directions, including compensation to the aggrieved, to mitigate severe pollution in Palar River in Tamil Nadu due to discharge of untreated effluents from local tanneries.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan asked the TN government to set up a panel under a former HC judge to assess and remediate the ecological damage.

"The tanneries by discharging untreated or partially treated effluents into the River Palar and surrounding areas have resulted in irreversible damage to the water bodies, groundwater and agricultural lands..," the court noted.

The verdict came on a lead petition titled: Vellore District Environment Monitoring Committee v. State of Tamil Nadu.

Pronouncing the verdict, Justice Mahadevan mandated compensation for the affected families besides directing the recovery of costs from polluting industries under the "Polluter Pays" principle.

It asked the state to recover the compensation amount from the polluters, if not recovered.

Though reports indicated authorities had established a central effluent treatment plant, said the court, the plants still hadn't achieved zero-levels while failing to comply with statutory environmental guidelines. —*PTI*

FRAME ARMY PENSION POLICY, SC TELLS CENTRE

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The Supreme Court on Thursday flayed the Centre for "dragging" ex-servicemen to court and asked it to frame a policy on the issue.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said each and every member of the armed forces who was awarded relief of disability pension from the Armed Forces Tribunal need not be dragged to the top court and the Centre ought to exercise some discretion in filing appeals.

Observing that "frivolous appeals" were being filed by the Centre in the apex court, the SC said the morale of the armed forces could not be let down by filing such pleas against the relief packages. —*PTI*

Nobody is above the law: SC in matrimonial dispute case

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Nobody is above the law in this country, the Supreme Court said on Thursday in a dispute between a man and his estranged wife, an IPS officer.

Justices BR Gavai, Augustine George Masih and K Vinod Chandran made the remark after the man's counsel raised an apprehension that he would be made to suffer all his life for the estranged wife was an IPS officer.

The bench said the parties should settle their disputes in the interest of justice and noted it couldn't force a settlement on the parties if they were unwilling. —*PTI*

NET paper leak: CBI files closure report

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

The CBI has submitted a closure report regarding the alleged leak of the UGC-NET 2024 examination, which was cancelled amid claims that the question paper had been sold on the darknet and circulated via Telegram.

The CBI's report, filed before a special court, says it found no evidence supporting the allegations. The agency has informed the Union Ministry of Education of its findings. The court is set to decide whether to close the case or order further investigation.

During its inquiry, the CBI identified that a "doctored" screenshot of the purported leaked question paper was being circulated by a student for profit. On the exam day, the modified paper appeared on Telegram channels, leading to suspicions of a breach.

The probe found that the person responsible for spreading the screenshot had altered the image along with its date and time stamp to suggest prior access to the paper. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

DOGS FIND SKULL AT HOSPITAL COMPOUND IN MP

JABALPUR, 30 JAN

Authorities have initiated an investigation following the emergence of a video on social media depicting two dogs playing with a skull on the premises of a government medical college in MP's Jabalpur. Police said the nature of the skull has yet to be determined.

Dr Navneet Saxena, dean of the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Medical College and Hospital, said, "We came to know about the incident on Wednesday. It is unclear if the skull is human; it may have been retrieved from a nearby lake or could possibly be an anatomical specimen taken home by students for study."

Inspector PK Sharma from Garha police station confirmed that officers visited the medical college on Wednesday but were unable to locate the skull featured in the video. An investigation is ongoing, he said. —*PTI*

Released from Lankan jail, 6 fishermen reach Chennai

CHENNAI, 30 JAN

Six fishermen from Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, have returned home after being released from a prison in Sri Lanka. Their release was facilitated through the intervention of both Central and State governments, according to an official at Chennai airport.

The fishermen boarded a flight from Colombo and arrived in Chennai on Wednesday night, where they were greeted by state officials who arranged for their transport back to their home district by road.

The six men had set off for fishing on 12 January but were arrested by the Sri Lankan Coast Guard for allegedly crossing the maritime border. Their vessel was seized, and they were subsequently produced before a court and remanded.

In an effort to secure their release, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin had previously written to Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, urging prompt action from the central government regarding the detained fishermen. —*PTI*

The group of six fishermen repatriated from Sri Lanka. They were arrested by the Lankan Coast Guard **PHOTO: X @IndiainSL**

LANCET STUDY

Periods ground 1 in 5 women in S Asia

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Nearly 20 per cent of women and girls in South Asia abstain from regular daily activities during periods, according to a study published in The Lancet Global Health journal.

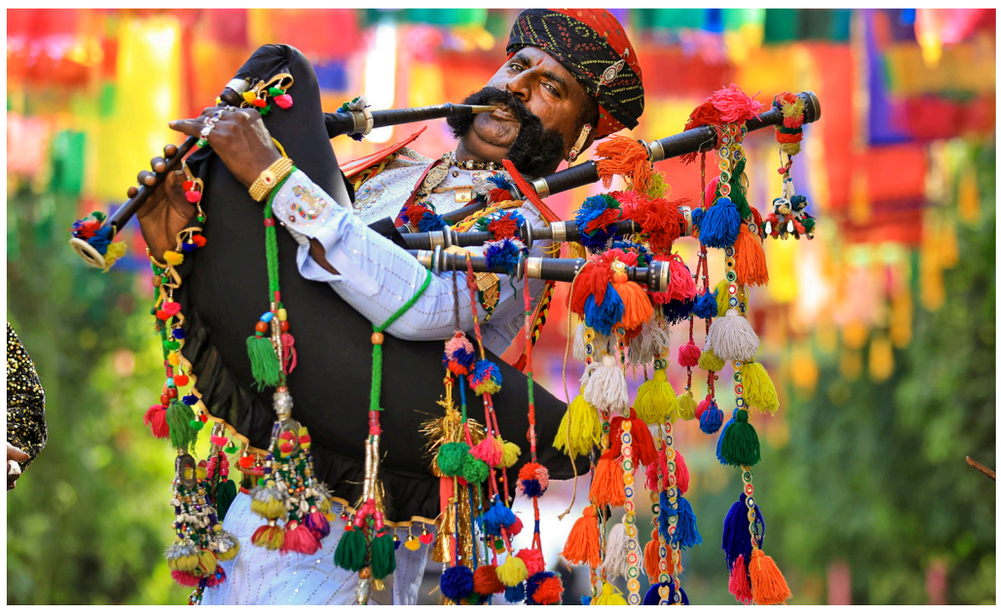
The study found that overall, 15 per cent of girls and women in low- and middle-income countries do not take part in daily activities while menstruating. In west and central Africa, it was the second highest at 18.5 per cent.

Researchers, including those from the University of Melbourne, Australia, also found that girls aged 15–19 years are the most affected, with over 17 per cent not participating in regular daily activities while menstruating.

Girls aged 15–19 years are the most affected, with over 17 per cent not participating in regular daily activities while menstruating **PHOTO: BIOM**

The study analysed data collected during 2017–2023 from households across 44 countries. Over 6,73,300 women and girls aged 15–49 years were included in this analysis. "The overall pooled prevalence of menstrual-related absenteeism was 15 per cent, with prevalence being highest in south Asia and west and central Africa," the authors wrote.

They found that household wealth or the use of menstrual products, such as sanitary pads or tampons, were not related with menstruation-related absence. However, having a private place to wash at home was associated with a higher prevalence of menstrual-related absence, as women and girls could "better meet their menstrual health needs at home compared with outside the home". —*PTI*



JAIPUR LIT FESTIVAL

A folk artist performs at the Jaipur Literature Festival in Jaipur on Thursday. The five-day annual literary fest, which will run from 30 January to 5 February, will feature more than 300 speakers from around the globe
PHOTO: PTI

Poor crowd control led to Maha Kumbh tragedy

At least 40 people were killed, and hundreds more injured, in the early hours of Wednesday when a stampede broke out at Maha Kumbh, the world's largest religious festival that every 12 years attracts millions of people to Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh.

Pandemonium broke loose when pilgrims began pushing towards the confluence of the sacred Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers to take a holy bath that devotees believe washes away sins and frees them from the cycle of rebirth.

Eyewitnesses told DW that barricades were breached, and people kept tripping over one another as thousands trampled over others trying to escape to safety on the riverbank.

"It was around 1.45am and people were getting flattened in the melee, and I could see this crush of humanity surge forward. Many women and children were asleep when the tragedy happened," Saurabh Singh, a festival attendee, told DW. "I was numb seeing such a crowd, and an hour later, I saw lifeless bodies lying on the ground."

Indra Shekhar, who has been camping at the festival for over a week, visited the scene soon after the stampede and saw hundreds of people being taken away in stretchers as waiting ambulances rushed the seriously injured to hospitals.

"This tragedy could have been easily avoided if there was better crowd control and the presence of adequate police. But the administration blocked over 28 platoon bridges leading to the river, which were reserved for VIPs, leading to the chaos," Shekar told DW.

Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister said the stampede broke out when pilgrims tried to jump over police barricades to reach the Sangam confluence. The Maha Kumbh has witnessed several tragic stampedes throughout its history. The dangers posed by huge crowds was a problem in earlier festivals, especially in 2003, 2010 and 2013, during which hundreds died.

Uttar Pradesh authorities had deployed over 2,700 CCTV cameras, with over 300 equipped with AI capabilities, to monitor crowd density and movement patterns in real time ***PHOTO: PTI***

In July 2024, over 120 people died during a religious gathering led by a self-styled godman in northern town of Hathras. Over 250,000 are estimated to have attended the event. The crowd reportedly started to stampede when the godman's security detail pushed followers who had knelt to collect the mud upon which the religious leader had walked. "In almost all religious stampedes, overcrowding, poor crowd management and rumors and panic have resulted in horrific tragedies," a senior official at Black Tiger Security Services told DW anonymously.

The deadly stampede at Maha Kumbh has raised fresh concerns over crowd control at religious gatherings.

Knowing there would be an estimated 400-450 million attendees over the six-week-long festival, authorities have deployed over 2,700 CCTV cameras, with over 300 equipped with AI capabilities, to monitor crowd density and movement patterns in real time.

Drones have been deployed to oversee the massive gathering of devotees to give officials an idea of when density thresholds of people are exceeded at various points on the festival grounds.

In addition, over 40,000 police officers are on-site to maintain order and manage crowds. They are supported by a command center that oversees operations using real-time data from surveillance systems. However, even with these measures, crowd control still fell apart.

"This technology, even AI, has not enabled authorities to manage crowds effectively and prevent overcrowding given that India has seen many stampedes in religious gatherings," Yashovardhan Azad, a former police officer, told DW. "Clearly, it has not helped, and there should be new thinking and approaches to handle crowds of this nature." At this festival, devotees also received wristbands for real-time tracking, which aids in locating individuals if they go missing and enhances overall safety. Anna Sieben, an associate professor of cultural and social psychology at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland, who has been researching crowd dynamics for years, pointed out that people who find themselves in a stampede often do not realize anything is wrong until it is too late.Dirk Helbing, a professor of computational social science at ETH Zurich in Switzerland, has attributed the stampedes to a phenomenon called "crowd turbulence." *—DW News*

SALAR ساہر

Trump's aid freeze disrupts global aid programmes

Almost USD 600 billion-have begun firing staff and shutting down or preparing to stop their operations, as the Trump administration's unprecedented freeze on almost all foreign assistance brings their work to a sudden halt.

Allies including Ukraine also are struggling to save part of their security funding from the 90-day freeze, ordered by President Donald Trump last week. Trump also just paused federal grants and loans inside the United States.

The Trump administration says it ordered the foreign aid pause to give it time to decide which of the thousands of humanitarian, development and security programs will keep getting money from the US.

Meantime, US officials ordered the programmes to stop spending immediately. Only emergency food programs and military aid to allies Israel and Egypt were exempt.

The freeze means schools in Liberia are prepared this week to fire cooks who provide children with lunch. US efforts to aid American businesses abroad and to counter China's rising influence could close. Veterans in Ukraine who call a crisis hotline may soon get a recorded message, with no promise of a call back.

Aid workers, local officials and analysts stress that the scale of the freeze was difficult to grasp.

The Trump administration placed more than 50 senior officials with the US Agency for International Development on leave Monday as many were helping organizations deal with the freeze. USAID's acting head said he was investigating whether the officials were resisting Trump's orders.

US policy for decades has been that aid given abroad pays for itself through greater national security, by stabilizing regions and economies and improving relations with partners.

But many Trump administration officials and Republican lawmakers believe much foreign assistance is money that should be spent or saved at home.

For every program, "we'll expect the State Department to defend, repent, or in some cases, make the case for continuation of their programs," said Rep. Brian Mast, Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says the US freeze doesn't affect vital American support to his military as it fights invading Russian forces. That's mostly true.

Most of Ukraine's military aid, however, has come from the Pentagon. That includes a program drawing from existing arms stocks and another called the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which is used to pay for weapons contracts that would not be delivered for a year or more.

But civilian programs vital to Ukraine's war effort do come from the State Department. There's no word of exemptions for them. That includes salary support that the US provides to keep Ukraine's government running despite the war's damage to the economy.

That support is important, said Bradley Bowman of the Foundation for Defence of Democracies. "But I think if our European allies are reading the political moment in the US well, they better be moving, I say quickly, to try to pick up most or all of that burden."

The US has sent stop-work orders to wartime civilian programs it supports in Ukraine.

That includes Veteran Hub, a nonprofit that runs a crisis hotline getting up to 1,300 calls a month from Ukrainian veterans who need social and psychological support.

In the southern African nation of Zimbabwe, Gumisayi Bonzo, director of a health nonprofit, worried for her organization — and for herself. Zimbabwe is one of the few African countries to achieve a milestone in HIV/AIDS diagnosis, treatment and suppression of viral load. That's thanks in large part to a groundbreaking HIV program created by Republican President George W. Bush, credited with saving more than 20 million lives. The program me— the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR — has been targeted by Republican hardliners. Bonzo had yet to hear word of a funding cutoff for her group, Trans Smart Trust, which promotes health services for bisexual and transgender people in a country where discrimination and stigma discourage many to seek treatment.

The US also has tried to raise its profile in the South Pacific to counter China's influence, including by bolstering USAID spending to nations that are among the most dependent on development finance.

During visits to the Pacific in 2024, officials announced more than $15 million in new spending, to boost natural disaster resilience, support economic growth, help countries withstand the ruinous effects of climate change, and more. *—PTI*

Only emergency food programs and military aid to allies Israel and Egypt were exempt ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

7,000 students & exchange visitors from India overstayed in US in 2023

Over 7,000 student and exchange visitors from India overstayed in the US in 2023, an expert told US lawmakers and suggested several reforms in the country's immigration policies, including those related to H-1B visas.

As many as 32 countries have student/exchange visitor overstay rates of higher than 20 per cent, Jessica M Vaughan from the Center for Immigration Studies told the US House Committee on the Judiciary during a hearing on "Restoring Immigration Enforcement in America."

The F and M visa categories have the highest overstay rates of any of the broad categories of temporary admission.

The F-1 Visa allows a person to enter the United States as a full-time student at an accredited college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution or in a language training programme.

The M-1 visa category includes students in vocational or other nonacademic programmes, other than language training.

"Four countries -- Brazil, China, Colombia and India -- each had more than 2,000 of their citizens overstaying student/exchange visas in 2023, with India having the highest number (7,000)," Vaughan said on Wednesday.

Visa issuance policies need adjustments and interior enforcement should be strengthened. Furthermore, Congress should amend the law in several significant ways, she stated.

"First, the concept of dual intent should not apply to student visa applicants; instead, each applicant should be required to demonstrate an intent and likelihood to return to their home country after their studies," she added.

Vaughan said visas for workers' speciality occupations (H-1B) should be limited to a period of two years with a possible extension to four years, and there should be no automatic extension based on a Green Card petition.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

"The total number should be limited to 75,000 or less, including the non-profit and research sector, which is currently unlimited. If the category is oversubscribed, then the visas should be awarded to the highest paying employers, as a proxy for the highest skilled workers," she said.

Brazil, China, Colombia and India -- each had more than 2,000 of their citizens overstaying student or exchange visas in 2023 ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

"Federal government agencies should be permitted to seek approval for visa workers only in very limited circumstances," she added.

Vaughan argued that the United States does not have a shortage of labour, either in skilled or low-wage occupations.

In fact, there are millions of Americans of working age who have dropped out of the labour market. Even in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) sector, there are more than two million US.

- The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Tech companies depend on it to hire employees India and China.

STEM degree-holders who are unemployed or not working in STEM, which is about one-sixth of the total, she asserted.

Besides directing more agency action, Congress should overhaul these visa programmes to increase opportunities for American workers.

"First, no staffing companies should be permitted to sponsor foreign visa workers.

"These companies operate on a business model designed to replace US workers with workers from abroad who will work for lower wages, and have been associated with illegal hiring practices, such as charging workers illegal recruitment fees and exploiting workers – in both skilled and low-wage occupations," she said.

All employers should be held accountable for high overstay rates for sponsored workers, she added. *—PTI*

US witnesses its deadliest crash since 2001

At least 28 bodies were fished out; authorities have early indications of the cause

WASHINGTON DC, 30 JAN

If everyone aboard the plane was killed, it would be the deadliest US airline crash since 12 November, 2001, when an American Airlines flight crashed into a residential area of Belle Harbour, New York, just after takeoff from Kennedy Airport, killing all 260 people aboard.

All 64 people aboard an American Airlines jet that collided with an Army helicopter were feared dead in what was likely to be the worst US aviation disaster in almost a quarter century, officials said on Thursday.

The last major fatal crash involving a US commercial airline occurred in 2009 near Buffalo, New York. Everyone aboard the Bombardier DHC-8 propeller plane was killed, including 45 passengers, two pilots and two flight attendants. Another person on the ground also died, bringing the total death toll to 50. An investigation determined that the captain accidentally caused the plane to stall as it approached the airport in Buffalo.

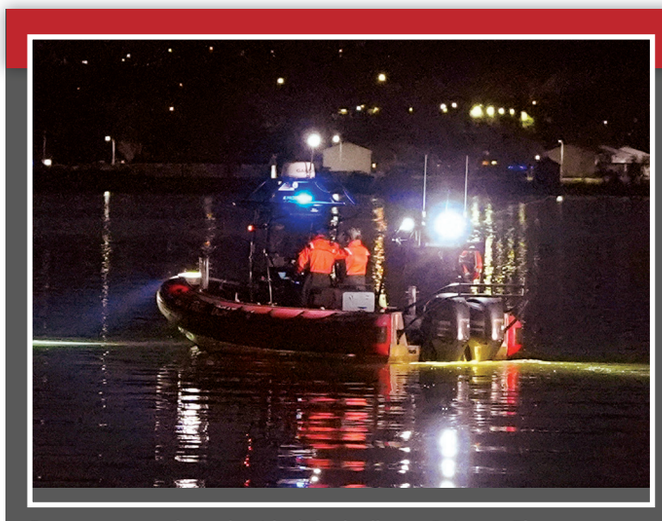
The night was clear, the plane and helicopter were both in standard flight patterns and there was standard communication between the aircraft and the tower, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said.

American Airlines Flight 5342 was inbound to Reagan National at an altitude of about 400 feet (122 metres) and a speed of about 140 mph (225 kph) when it rapidly lost altitude over the Potomac River, according to data from its radio transponder. The Canadian-made Bombardier CRJ-701 twin-engine jet, manufactured in 2004, can be configured to carry up to 70 passengers.

A few minutes before landing, air traffic controllers asked the arriving commercial jet if it could land on the shorter Runway 33 at Reagan National and the pilots said they were able. Controllers then cleared the plane to land on Runway 33.

Flight-tracking sites showed the plane adjust its approach to the new runway.

Less than 30 seconds before the crash, an air traffic controller asked the helicopter if it had the arriving plane in sight. The controller made another radio call to the helicopter moments later: "PAT 25 pass behind the CRJ." Seconds after that, the two aircraft collided. —*PTI*



Rescue personnel on a boat look for bodies on Potomac River near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

DEADLIEST US PLANE CRASHES SINCE 1982 (excluding 9/11)

- Buffalo, New York, 2009: Colgan Air crash: 50 dead.
- Lexington, Kentucky, 2006 – Comair crash: 49 dead.
- Belle Harbor, New York, 2001 – American Airlines crash: 260 dead.
- Anacapa Island, California, 2000 – Alaska Airlines crash: 88 dead.
- East Moriches, New York, 1996 – TWA crash: 230 dead.
- Everglades, Florida, 1996 – ValuJet crash: 110 dead.
- Roselawn, Indiana, 1994 – American Eagle crash: 68 dead.
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1994 – USAir crash: 132 dead.
- Sioux City, Iowa, 1989 – United Airlines crash: 111 dead.
- Romulus, Michigan, 1987 – Northwest Airlines crash: 154 dead.
- Dallas, Texas, 1985 – Delta Airlines crash: 134 dead.
- New Orleans, Louisiana, 1982 – Pan Am crash: 145 dead.
- Potomac River, Washington, DC, 1982 – Air Florida crash: 74 dead.

PHOTO: X

Pilots among 19 killed as plane crashes in Sudan

KHARTOUM, 30 JAN

A Juba-bound plane crashed as it departed from South Sudan's major Unity Oil Field on Wednesday, killing at least 19 of those on board, a United Nations radio station said. "The pilot and co-pilot are among the dead," radio Miraya said, adding that the plane was carrying 21, including the pilot. Unity State Information Minister Gatwech Bipal Both said the aircraft was on a routine mission to the area. It was chartered by the Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC) and operated by Light Air Services Aviation Company. The war-torn South Sudan has witnessed several air crashes in recent years. A September 2018 crash killed at least 19 people on board a small aircraft headed from the capital Juba to the city of Yirol. —*DW News*

Graffiti scare follows explosives find in Australia

MELBOURNE, 30 JAN

Three more incidents of anti-Semitic graffiti were found across Sydney on Thursday morning, leading Australian political leaders to warn of an escalation in hatred and decry as terrorism explosives found earlier in a trailer on the city's outskirts. Law enforcement agencies earlier this month found a list of Jewish targets, together with a cache of Powergel – an explosive used in the mining industry – in Sydney's outer suburb of Dural, state police said on Wednesday. The quantity of the explosive uncovered could create a bomb with a blast zone of around 40 metres, officers said. "This represents, undeniably, an escalation in race hatred, race-filled hatred and potential violence in New South Wales," the state's Premier Chris Minns said on Thursday. —*PTI*

No damage as 5.6 magnitude quake shakes Taiwan

TAIPEI, 30 JAN

A magnitude 5.6 earthquake shook buildings in Taiwan on Thursday morning, causing little damage but possibly portending more seismic activity in the near future. The biggest of the quakes hit at 10.11am in Chiayi county's Dapu township at a depth of 10km, said the Central Weather Agency and the US Geological Survey. The epicentre was about 250km south of capital Taipei, where buildings swayed slightly. It was followed by at least a dozen smaller quakes in Dapu. No damage or casualties were reported. All were aftershocks from a magnitude 6.4 earthquake that struck Dapu on 21 January, injuring 15 and damaging buildings and a bridge. —*PTI*

Taiwan detects increased Chinese activity

TAIPEI, 30 JAN

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence on Thursday reported heightened Chinese military activity near its territory. "6 PLA aircraft and 5 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6am today. 3 of the aircraft crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's northern and south-western ADIZ (Air Defence Identification Zone). 3 PRC balloons were detected during this timeframe," the ministry posted on X. The growing presence of Chinese military forces near Taiwan has raised concerns about Beijing's intentions in the region. Chinese activity around Taiwan has been steadily increasing, with numerous incursions into its ADIZ. The median line, once regarded as an unofficial boundary, has been crossed more frequently by Chinese aircraft, signalling a shift in Beijing's stance toward Taiwan. —*ANI*

A crowd greets Hamas men as they arrive for the hand-over of Israeli and Thai hostages to the Red Cross in Khan Younis **PHOTO: PTI**

Hamas, Israel to swap 118 captives

DEIR AL-BALAH, 30 JAN

Hamas began the process of freeing three more Israeli hostages and five Thai captives on Thursday, the third such release since a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip took hold earlier this month. Israel was expected to release another 110 Palestinian prisoners.

The truce is aimed at winding down the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and Hamas, whose 7 October, 2023, attack into Israel sparked the fighting. It has held despite a dispute earlier this week over the sequence in which the hostages were released.

Hamas handed female Israeli soldier Agam Berger, 20, to the Red Cross at a ceremony in the heavily destroyed refugee camp of Jabaliya in northern Gaza. The Israeli government later confirmed that Berger was with its forces.

Another ceremony was planned in the southern city of Khan Younis, in front of the destroyed home of slain Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. Both were attended by hundreds of people, including masked militants and onlookers.

In Israel, people cheered, clapped and whistled at a square in Tel Aviv where supporters of the hostages watched Berger's handover on big screens next to a large clock that's counted the days the hostages have been in captivity. Some held signs saying: "Agam we're waiting for you at home."

Berger was among five young, female soldiers abducted in the 7 October attack. The other four were released on Saturday. The other two Israelis set to be released Thursday are Arbel Yehoud, 29, and Gadi Moses, an 80-year-old man. —*PTI*

MAKING AMERICA SAFER

Trump signs immigrant detention law

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

US President Donald Trump has signed his first piece of legislation into law that permits the pre-trial detention of illegal migrants accused of theft, burglary or shoplifting.

The Laken Riley Immigration Act had earlier won bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. It is Trump's first piece of legislation since he took office on 20 January.

"Under the law I'm signing today, the Department of Homeland Security will be required to detain all illegal aliens who have been arrested for theft, burglary, larceny, shoplifting, assaulting a police officer murder, or any crime that results in death or serious injury," Trump said on Wednesday.

"In addition, for the first time ever, this Act gives state governments the ability to sue the federal government for immediate injunctive relief if any future administration ever again refuses to enforce the immigration laws of the United States like happened for four long years," Trump said.

President Donald Trump hands a pen to Allyson Phillips, mother of Laken Riley, after signing the Laken Riley Act on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

On Wednesday, Trump also signed a presidential memorandum to set up a 30,000-person migrant facility at Guantanamo Bay to detain "high-priority criminal aliens."

The facility, which has so far been used to hold terrorists, will now also house illegal immigrants with criminal records.

The signing took place on Wednesday, with Trump directing the Departments of Defence and Homeland Security to prepare the facility. —*PTI*

Prez choice for Intel set to face confirmation grill

WASHINGTON DC, 30 JAN

Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's pick to head national intelligence, is expected to face tough questions from lawmakers on Thursday over past comments about Russia and a 2017 visit with Syria's then leader.

The grilling during Gabbard's confirmation hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee could reveal whether she has successfully assuaged concerns from lawmakers of both parties – or whether worries about her experience and background will sink her nomination to oversee 18 US intelligence agencies.

Gabbard has no formal intelligence experience and has never run a government agency or department. —*PTI*

BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP BILL TABLED IN SENATE

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

Three Republican Senators have introduced a bill in the US Senate to restrict birthright citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants and non-immigrants on temporary visas. The legislative move comes after an executive order signed by President Donald Trump on the matter was blocked by a federal judge in Washington. —*PTI*

85%

of Greenlanders oppose joining the US

META AGREES TO PAY $25M TO SETTLE JAN 6 LAWSUIT

WASHINGTON, 30 JAN

Meta has agreed to pay USD 25M to settle a lawsuit filed by President Donald Trump against the company after it suspended his accounts following the 6 January, 2021, attack on the Capitol. It's the latest instance of a large corporation settling litigation with the president, who has threatened retribution on his critics and rivals. —*PTI*

Russian drone strikes apartment building in Ukraine, kills four

KYIV, 30 JAN

A Russian drone blasted a hole in an apartment building in northeastern Ukraine during a nighttime attack, killing at least four people and injuring nine others, officials said Thursday.

The Shahed drone blew out a wall and surrounding windows in the apartment block in Sumy, a major city, just after 1am, the Sumy regional administration said. Four people were rescued from the rubble, and a child was among the injured, it said, adding that 120 people were evacuated.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called it "a terrible tragedy, a terrible Russian crime."

A serviceman demonstrates a Ukrainian made FPV fibre optic drone **PHOTO: PTI**

The war between Russia and Ukraine has killed more than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians, according to the United Nations.

Civilians have also endured hardship caused by Russian attacks on the power grid that have denied them heating and running water. Many have been evacuated from areas along the roughly 1,000-km front line where Ukrainian defences are straining to hold the Russian army at bay.

Russia launched more than 80 drones at Ukraine overnight, the air force reported, in what are common nighttime barrages. Most of the drones were shot down or stopped by electronic jamming, it said. —*PTI*

Rwanda-backed rebels expand control in Congo

GOMA, 30 JAN

Rebels backed by Rwanda captured more towns in eastern Congo on Wednesday as they moved beyond the key city of Goma in an apparent attempt to expand their control in the conflict-battered region.

The rebels advanced toward the centre of South Kivu after taking several towns, including Kalungu, Kanyezire and Mukwinja, said a local civil society leader and an aid worker in the area.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the developments were concerning and that the organisation was taking measures to protect its staff and civilians. The advance also raised fears of a prolonged occupation by the rebels, who want to set up a new administration in Goma.

"Left unchecked, the fighting could spread... recalling the horrors of the late 1990s and early 2000s when millions died," the Crisis Group said.

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi was conspicuously absent from a virtual summit of East African bloc hosted by Kenya on Wednesday. —*PTI*

Salwan Momika **PHOTO: X**

Iraqi man who burned Quran killed in Sweden

STOCKHOLM, 30 JAN

An Iraqi man who carried out several Quran burnings in Sweden has died, a judge in Stockholm said on Thursday. Swedish media reported that he was killed in a shooting in a nearby city.

Salwan Momika, 38, staged several burnings and desecrations of Quran in Sweden in 2023. Videos of his acts got worldwide publicity and raised anger and criticism in several Muslim nations, leading to riots and unrest.

There is no information on when Momika died.

Momika argued that his protests targeted the religion of Islam, not Muslim people. Swedish police allowed his demonstrations, citing freedom of speech, while filing charges against him.

Momika and a co-defendant were charged in the Stockholm court with incitement to racial hatred because of statements they made. —*PTI*

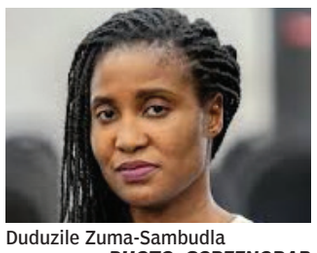
S Africa ex-prez's daughter faces terrorism charges

JOHANNESBURG, 30 JAN

A daughter of former South African President Jacob Zuma has been arrested and is expected to be produced in court on Thursday to face terrorism charges.

Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, who is also a member of the South African Parliament, is accused of inciting violence during riots in July 2021 which led to the deaths of more than 350 people.

Zuma-Sambudla handed herself over to police on Thursday to face charges under the Protection of Constitutional Democracy against Terrorist and Related Activities Act and incitement to commit violence, police officials said.



Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

The case against Zuma-Sambudla is based on posts she made on Twitter, now called X, allegedly urging protesters to cause more damage during nationwide unrest that started after her father was sent to jail. —*PTI*

PREACHING VS PRACTICE

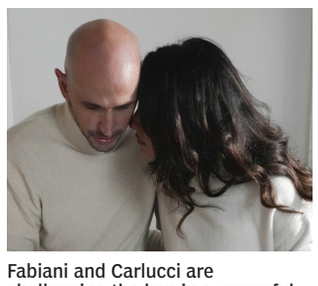
Vatican bank fires newlywed couple

ROME, 30 JAN

Pope Francis has long urged couples to marry and have babies rather than dogs. He also has long championed the rights of workers and held up labour itself as the foundation of human dignity.

So it has come as something of a surprise to many in the Holy See that the Vatican bank fired a young newlywed couple, with three young children between them, after a new internal bank regulation went into effect barring workplace marriages.

The apparent contradiction between what the pope preaches and what his Vatican practices is not lost on Silvia Carlucci and Domenico Fabiani, who are challenging the ban in a wrongful termination lawsuit before the Vatican tribunal.



Fabiani and Carlucci are challenging the ban in a wrongful termination lawsuit before the Vatican tribunal **PHOTO: X**

They said they could not contemplate the bank's suggestion that one of them quit to avoid running afoul of the new rule.

"I thought for sure there might have been an intervention by the Holy Father, who rightly gives so much emphasis and value to the role of the family," Fabiani said. "And yet here we find a family that works there and now finds itself on the street."

Carlucci was blunter. "There's a great contrast between what truly happens (in the Vatican) and what is promoted," she said. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Gold prices scale yet another peak of ₹83,800 per 10gms

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Gold prices rose for the second straight session to hit another fresh all-time high of Rs 83,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong global trends. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity edged up by Rs 50 to hit another fresh peak of Rs 83,800 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 83,750 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also advanced Rs 50 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 83,400 per 10 grams. It had closed at Rs 83,350 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Additionally, silver rallied by Rs 1,150 to Rs 94,150 per kg. —*PTI*

Rupee falls 9P to close at 86.64 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 86.64 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by a strong US dollar amid a hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve. Forex traders said the rupee continued to face pressure due to sustained foreign fund outflows and the broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.58 and touched a high of 86.56 and a low of 86.65 against the American currency during the session. The local unit settled at 86.64 (provisional), registering a fall of 9 paise over its previous close. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.02 per cent lower at 107.98. —*PTI*

Suzuki's made in India Jimny debuts in Japan

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Maruti Suzuki India said the locally manufactured Jimny five-door model has made its debut in the Japanese market. The SUV, which is exclusively manufactured at Maruti Suzuki's Gurugram-based plant, was unveiled in Japan on Thursday. It is the company's second model to be exported to Japan this financial year, after Fronx in August 2024. With the three-door version of Jimny already on sale in the Japanese market the company hoped the five-door version will further add to the popularity of the model. With India as a production base, Suzuki aims to leverage its global stature to meet the growing demands. Maruti Suzuki has shipped over 3.23 lakh vehicles to around 100 countries in 2024.—*PTI*

JSW Energy revises FY25 capex to Rs 10,000 crore

KOLKATA, 30 JAN

JSW Energy has revised its capital expenditure (capex) target for FY'25 to Rs 10,000 crore, down from an earlier estimate of Rs 15,000 crore, citing strategic shifts toward inorganic growth through acquisitions. In the first nine months of the fiscal, the steel major had incurred capex spending of Rs 6200 crore, an official said. Initially, the company had projected a capex of Rs 15,000 crore for the year. The higher expected investment in organic projects was impacted by sectoral constraints, particularly around connectivity and related challenges, he said. The current batch of projects that the company are planning to complete are getting completed, the official added. The company is allocating Rs 13,000-14,000 crore for the 2.4 GW under-construction renewable projects of O2 Power, a Rs 12,468-crore acquisition by JSW completed in December. —*PTI*

Challenges ahead as FM prepares for Budget

Decelerating economy, Rupee value key issues to be addressed

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, set to make history with her eighth consecutive Union Budget, has worked tirelessly with key officials, including Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, to prepare a budget of over Rs 50 lakh crore for FY26.

The Budget will have to address several challenges, including decelerating economic growth, falling value of Rupee against the US dollar and moderation in consumption demand.

The economic growth is estimated to slow to a 4-year low of 6.4 per cent in FY25. This is the lowest growth since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic which hit world in 2019.

Sithraman, who had steered the Indian economy through many difficult phases, including once-in-a-century pandemic, is confronted with economic deceleration, moderation in consumption, stagnant private investment, and an geo-political situation.

The team, assisting the Finance Minister to frame Budget proposals for 2025-26, include Revenue Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Arunish Chawla, Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju, and Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran. —*PTI*

BUDGET 2025-26: KEY NUMBERS TO WATCH

FISCAL DEFICIT
- FY25 estimate: **4.9%** of GDP.
- Target for FY26: **4.5%** of GDP.

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE
- Budgeted at **Rs 11.1** lakh crore.
- Election-driven delays lowers spendings.

GOVERNMENT BORROWING
- FY25 gross borrowing: **Rs 14.01** lakh crore
- Expected impact from lower RBI dividend in FY'26

DISINVESTMENT & ASSET MONETISATION
- Target for FY25: **Rs 50,000** crore.
- FY26 roadmap expected in Budget.

TAX REVENUE
- Gross Tax Revenue: **Rs 38.40** lakh crore.
- Direct Taxes: **Rs 22.07** lakh crore.
- Indirect Taxes (GST, customs, excise): **Rs 16.33** lakh crore.

GST COLLECTIONS
- FY25 Estimate: **Rs 10.62** lakh crore (+11%).
- Growth slowing in recent months.

NOMINAL GDP GROWTH
- FY25 Estimate: **10.5%**.
- Real GDP Growth: **6.4%**.
- FY'26 projection crucial for inflation outlook.

DIVIDEND ESTIMATES
- RBI & Financial Institutions: **Rs 2.33** lakh crore.
- CPSEs: **Rs 56,260** crore.

SECTORAL SPENDING FOCUS
- Key schemes like NREGA, health, education.
- Expected allocations to be closely watched.

AIRTEL, RIL MAJOR MOVERS

NSE Nifty went up by 86.40 points or 0.37 per cent to 23,249.50 ***PHOTO: PTI***

Markets rally for 3rd day; Sensex up 226.85 points

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

Extending the winning run to the third day, benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher on Thursday on buying in heavyweight stocks Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and HDFC Bank.

The 30-share Sensex advanced 226.85 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 76,759.81 in a volatile trade. During the day, it surged 429.92 points or 0.56 per cent to 76,962.88.

The NSE Nifty went up by 86.40 points or 0.37 per cent to 23,249.50.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, Nestle, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints, IndusInd Bank, Hindustan Unilever and HDFC Bank were the biggest gainers.

Bajaj Finance climbed nearly 2 per cent after the company reported an 18 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 4,308 crore for the December quarter.

Tata Motors tanked over 7 per cent after the firm reported a 22 per cent fall in consolidated net profit to Rs 5,578 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024, impacted by a decline in revenue from its passenger and commercial vehicles divisions.

ITC Hotels, Bajaj Finserv, Adani Ports, Tech Mahindra, Zomato and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,586.43 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.43 per cent to USD 76.25 a barrel. —*PTI*

Adani Ports profit rises 14%

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) on Thursday reported 14 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,518.39 crore for December quarter 2024-25, driven by higher income.

The country's largest integrated logistics player had clocked a profit of Rs 2,208.21 crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing.

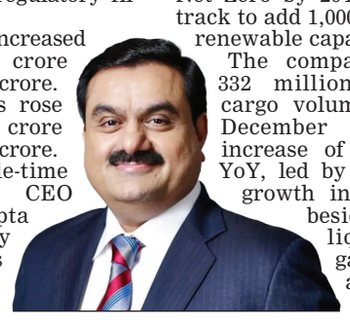
Total income increased to Rs 8,186.90 crore from Rs 7,426.95 crore.

Total expenses rose to Rs 5,190.53 crore from Rs 4,588.10 crore.

APSEZ Whole-time Director and CEO Ashwani Gupta said the company has upgraded its FY25 EBITDA forecast to Rs 18,800-18,900 crore.

- The country's largest integrated logistics player had clocked a profit of Rs 2,208.21 crore in the year-ago period, according to a regulatory filing

The company is targeting Net Zero by 2040 and is on track to add 1,000 MW of new renewable capacity.



The company clocked 332 million tonne in cargo volume in April-December FY25, an increase of 7 per cent YoY, led by 19 per cent growth in containers, besides rise in liquids and gas, and dry and dry bulk cargo. —*PTI*

Adani flagship's profit slumps 97% in Q3

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Adani Enterprises Ltd, the flagship company of billionaire Gautam Adani-led group, on Thursday reported a 97 per cent drop in the third quarter net profit as key coal trading volumes were hit. Net profit declined to Rs 57.83 crore in October-December 2024 - the third quarter of April 2024 to March 2025 fiscal (FY25) - from Rs 1,888.45 crore earnings a year back, the company said in a statement. Revenue from operations declined 9 per cent to Rs 22,848.42 crore. Pre-tax profit (EBITDA) halved to Rs 745 crore as volumes fell. —*PTI*

FOR SEAMLESS TRAVEL

AI partners with Kenya Airways for codeshare

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Air India has entered into a codeshare partnership with Kenya Airways as the Tata Group-owned airline seeks to expand as well as provide more travel choices for passengers.

Both airlines will also continue to have their interline partnership.

As part of the codeshare pact, Air India will place its 'AI' designator code on twice daily flights between Nairobi and Mumbai operated by Kenya Airways. This will allow passengers to take Air India flights via Mumbai to or from Bangkok (Thailand), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Malé (The Maldives), Melbourne (Australia), and Singapore, according to a release on Thursday.

The codeshare partnership will also enable Kenya Airways to place its 'KQ' designator code on Air India-operated flights between Delhi and Nairobi. Currently, Air India has 16 codeshare and around 100 interline agreements with various airlines.

Generally, a codeshare partnership allows an airline to book its passengers on its partner carrier and there will be a single ticket. Under an interline arrangement, an airline issues and accepts tickets for flights operated by the partner carrier and the passenger will have a single itinerary but different tickets. —*PTI*

Moscow-India in talks for group visa-free travel

MUMBAI, 30 JAN

The Moscow City Tourism Committee is in discussions with the Indian government for a 'group-free visa regime,' allowing a specified number of tourists travelling together in a group to enter Russia without a visa.

"When there is a group of tourists travelling together to Russia, the particular number should be mentioned in the document for the visit to become visa free. Russian government is in talks with the Indian External Affairs Ministry for a final agreement on the number of people," Moscow Tourism Committee Chairman Evgeny Kozlov told. Kozlov said India is an important country and is second in terms of source market. —*PTI*

Nissan likely to cut jobs & production in US

TOKYO, 30 JAN

Nissan is slashing production at its US plants and offering buyouts to factory workers there as part of the Japanese automaker's urgent efforts to return to profitability.

The move is part of Nissan Motor Corp.'s plans, announced two months ago, to slash 9,000 jobs globally, including in China, after it racked up a quarterly loss due to sinking sales and ballooning inventory.

At Nissan's plant in Smyrna, Tennessee, one production line will maintain two shifts, while the other line will consolidate to one shift.

PHOTO:WIKIPEDIA

- The move is part of Nissan Motor Corp.'s plans, announced two months ago, to slash 9,000 jobs globally, including in China, after it racked up a quarterly loss due to sinking sales

The Smyrna plant makes Murano, Pathfinder and Rogue sport-utility vehicles and the Infiniti QX60 luxury model.

In the Canton plant in Mississippi, which makes the Altima sedan and Frontier pickup, Nissan is reducing the speed on one line and consolidating another.

The workforce reduction of 9,000 people amounts to about 6 per cent of its more than 133,000 global employees. The company also plans to slash its global production capacity by 20 per cent.

Nissan, based in the port city of Yokohama, said the latest offers count toward its overall job reduction plans, and are designed to make its operations efficient and flexible.

Separately, Nissan and Japanese rival Honda Motor Co are working to form a joint holding company to integrate their businesses. —*PTI*

Whirlpool co-op to reduce stakes by 20% in Indian arm

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

American home appliances major Whirlpool Corporation plans to trim its stake in its Indian arm, Whirlpool of India Ltd, to approximately 20 per cent by mid to late 2025, according to a regulatory filing by the company.

Earlier, Whirlpool Corporation had offloaded 24 per cent of its stake in Whirlpool of India Ltd in a block deal, raising approximately USD 468 million.

Whirlpool Corporation, which currently holds a 51 per cent ownership interest in Whirlpool of India Ltd, expects to remain the largest shareholder following completion of the sell-down.

"Whirlpool India will remain a relevant part of Whirlpool Corporation's portfolio, and we continue to believe Whirlpool India has a strong long-term trajectory for growth," Peters said.

Whirlpool of India is one of the leading home appliances firms, and operates three manufacturing facilities at Faridabad, Puducherry and Pune. —*PTI*

INDIA TO MAKE AI MODEL

DeepSeek to be hosted on Indian servers: Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Union Minister of Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, announced on Thursday that the popular Chinese open-source Artificial Intelligence (AI) model, DeepSeek, will soon be hosted on Indian servers to address privacy concerns. Vaishnaw also revealed that India plans to create its own foundational AI model in the coming months, further solidifying the country's ambitions in the AI space.

In a series of announcements aimed at positioning India as a global leader in AI, Vaishnaw shared plans for the empanelment of 18,693 graphics processing units (GPUs) under a common computing facility. He also confirmed the establishment of an AI safety institution, emphasizing the government's commitment to making modern technology accessible to all.

PHOTO:WIKIPEDIA

"Our compute facility is the most affordable at this point in time," Vaishnaw stated, reiterating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of democratising technology. The minister highlighted the government's Rs 10,300 crore investment in AI through the IndiaAI mission.

Vaishnaw defended the government's AI investment amid skepticism, referencing DeepSeek's success with a $5.5 million investment. His comments echoed sentiments expressed by OpenAI's Sam Altman, who had earlier expressed doubts about the capabilities of Indian teams to develop significant AI models.

Vaishnaw's announcements underscored India's determination to carve out a pivotal role in the global AI ecosystem. —*Agencies*

ALIBABA ENTERS THE AI RACE

Alibaba unveils Qwen 2.5-Max, challenging DeepSeek, OpenAI, and Meta.

Launch Date: 29 January

Claim: Outperforms DeepSeek, ChatGPT, and Llama.

Goal: Strengthen Alibaba's position in global AI competition.

What makes it stand out?

Advanced natural language processing – It enhances a model's ability to understand, interpret, and generate human-like text

Enhanced Contextual Accuracy – More precise responses.

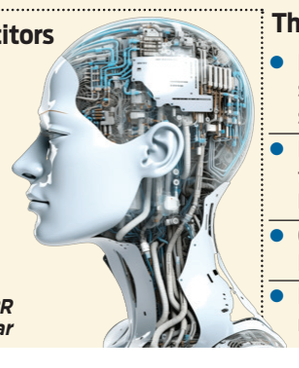
Scalability & Efficiency – Handles larger data in real-time.

How it compares to competitors

DeepSeek – Cost-effective AI with advanced reasoning abilities.

ChatGPT – OpenAI's leader in conversational AI.

Llama – Meta's open-source AI boosting accessibility.



The AI Battle Heats Up
- DeepSeek's breakthroughs have shaken Silicon Valley, triggering stock dips.
- ByteDance updates AI model just two days after DeepSeek-R1's launch.
- Chinese AI giants (Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu) under pressure to keep up.
- Low-cost, high-performance AI models disrupting the industry.

Research: Subhalakshmi PR
Design: Surendhar

Kidambi, Subramanian enter Thailand Masters QF

BANGKOK, 30 JAN

Former world No. 1 Srikanth and S Subramanian won their respective matches to reach the men's singles quarterfinals of the Thailand Masters BWF Super 300 tournament here on Thursday. Srikanth needed only 42 minutes to get the better of the 20-year-old Jason from Hong Kong 21-19, 21-15 in his round of 16 contest. He had previously beaten Gunawan in the Badminton Asia Team Championships last year. Subramanian had to work hard for his victory over Chico from Indonesia. Subramanian lost the opening set before sealing the issue 9-21, 21-10, 21-17. In mixed doubles, however, the Indian pair of Rohan and Ruthvika were beaten 19-21, 15-21 —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Greg set to join organising board for 2032 Olympics

BRISBANE, 30 JAN

Greg Norman is set to link up with organizers of the Brisbane 2032 Olympics.Norman, a two-time British Open champion and the only player to lose all four majors in a playoff following 72 holes has recently been replaced as CEO of LIV Golf by Scott O'Neil ahead of the tour's fourth season starting next month. News Corp. reported Thursday that Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese had picked Norman to replace a retiring politician on the 24-person organizing board for the 2032 Olympics.The Games will be held in Norman's home state of Queensland, Australia. "As a proud Queenslander, it is an honor and privilege to help shape the Brisbane Games," Norman told Brisbane's Courier-Mail newspaper. As a youth, Norman worked at Royal Queensland, the riverside course that will host the Olympic golf tournament in 2032.—*PTI*

Several young players in Hockey India's list for FIH

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

India on Thursday included more than half-a-dozen young players in the long list of probables for the upcoming FIH Pro League, based on their performance in the Hockey India League and junior level competitions. Among those included in the list of 32 senior probables for the first time are goalkeeper Princedeep Singh, defender Yashdeep Siwach, midfielders Rabichandra Singh and Rajinder Singh, and forwards Angad Bir Singh, Uttam Singh and Arshdeep Singh.—*PTI*

PHOTO: @PCB

PCB finalises schedule for Champions Trophy

LAHORE, 30 JAN

According to reliable sources, PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has given final approval for all planned events, with high-profile dignitaries expected to attend. The first major event will take place on February 7 at Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore, where Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif be the chief guest. The celebrations will then move to the National Bank Stadium in Karachi, on February 11, with President Asif Ali Zardari expected to attend. The main Champions Trophy opening ceremony is scheduled for February 16 at Hazoori Bagh, Lahore, where top government officials, legendary cricketers, and ICC representatives will be present.—*PTI*

K'taka 267/5 vs Haryana in must-win match

Rahul fell short in post-lunch session to Haryana's Anshul

BENGALURU, 30 JAN

KL Rahul's much-anticipated return to Ranji Trophy lasted a mere 37 balls as the India opener was dismissed for 26, leaving Karnataka at 267/5 against Haryana on day one of their must-win Group C match here on Thursday.

Making his first Ranji Trophy appearance since February 2020, local hero Rahul walked in at No. 3 to a warm reception from the semi-packed M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, with chants of 'Rahul, Rahul' echoing through the stands.

K'taka skipper Mayank Agarwal scored 91

The stylish right-hander looked in fine touch from the outset, striking four crisp boundaries in a fluent 54-run stand with Karnataka skipper Mayank Agarwal for the second wicket. However, just as he appeared to settle down, Rahul fell in the post-lunch session to Haryana's in-form pacer Anshul Kamboj.

The leading wicket-taker for Haryana this season produced a peach of a delivery that forced the experienced India batter into an edge, with wicketkeeper Rohit Sharma making no mistake behind the stumps. The Haryana pace spearhead was once again the pick of the bowler as he dismissed opener KV Avneesh (17) before lunch after the visiting side opted to bowl.Rahul had last featured in a Ranji Trophy match nearly four years ago, against Bengal at the Eden Gardens quarterfinal, where he had scores of 26 and 0 in Karnataka's 174-run defeat.**Brief Scores**

Karnataka 267/5; 89 overs (Mayank Agarwal 91, Devdutt Padikkal 43, R Smaran 35, KL Rahul 26, Yashovardhan Parantap 27 batting, KL Shrijith 18 batting; Anshul Kamboj 2/25, Anuj Thakral 2/74). —*PTI*

Yadav makes 95 as Delhi trail by 200 runs

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

On a day when fans flocked to the Arun Jaitley Stadium in large numbers to catch a glimpse of their hometown stalwart Virat Kohli on his return to domestic cricket, wicketkeeper-batter Upendra Yadav bagged accolades by making a superb 95 on Day One of the Ranji Trophy match on Thursday. After being asked to bat, Railways failed to get a good start against Delhi as Sharma picked up Anchit Yadav's wicket in the second over of the inning. Soon after Anchit's wicket, Navdeep Saini removed Vivek on a duck. Railways were 66 for 5. Upendra Yadav was the lone warrior for the visitors as he scored 95 runs before Sumit Mathur picked his wicket in the 66th over. Kohli's towering presence on the field fired up players on both sides with an unprecedented fan attendance adding to the intensity.

With more than 12,000 people in the stands for a Ranji Trophy game that would be otherwise played in front of empty stands, Upendra made a big impact after the fine show by the Delhi Pacers. —*PTI*

Shardul takes a hat-trick in Ranji Trophy

India seamer Shardul Thakur claimed a hat-trick for Mumbai against Meghalaya in a must-win Ranji Trophy match here at the Sharad Pawar Cricket Academy on Thursday. He became the second bowler to take a hat-trick in the 2024/25 Ranji Trophy season after Himachal Pradesh's Rishi Dhawan against Pondicherry.Moreover, the 33-year-old became the fifth bowler from Mumbai to take a hat-trick in the Ranji Trophy history.

—*PTI*

38 NATIONAL GAMES

Narmada Raju wins women's 10m air rifle gold medal

DEHRADUN, 30 JAN

Former World Cup winner Narmada Nithin Raju overcame a strong field, which included Asian Games medallist Ramita Jindal and Olympian Elavenil Valarivan, not only created a national record but missed equalling the world mark by a fraction of a point on her way to clinching gold in the women's 10m air rifle event at the 38th National Games here on Thursday.

Narmada, representing Tamil Nadu, clinched the top podium finish with a score of 254.4, beating back the challenge from Maharashtra's Arya Borse (252.5) and Ramita (230.4) in the eight-shooter final. In the process, she broke the national mark of 252.9 set by Olympian Apurvi Chandela at the 2019 World Cup in New Delhi. The world record in the event is 254.5 points.

—PTI

John, Pooja win gold in road cycling

Karnataka's Naveen Thomas John and Maharashtra's Pooja Baban Danole won the men's and women's road cycling gold medals, respectively, at the National Games here on Thursday. Representing the Services Sports Control Board in the men's road cycling event, Dinesh Kumar claimed the silver medal, while Punjab's Harshveer Singh Shekon bagged the bronze. In the women's competition, Monika Jat of Rajasthan clinched silver and Karnataka's Megha Gogad settled for bronze. —*PTI*

Anish Bhanwala wins Gold medal in 25m Rapid Fire Pistol event. Gurpreet Singh won Silver Vijayveer Sidhu won Bronze. PHOTO: PTI

TATA STEEL CHESS

Gukesh beats Warmerdam to stay in sole lead

WIJK AAN ZEE, 30 JAN

World champion D Gukesh defeated Dutch Grandmaster Max Warmerdam to stay in sole lead on 7.5 points at the end of the 10th round of the Tata Steel Chess tournament here.

It was another eventful day for Gukesh who is now closing in on the 2800-rating barrier. The victory came easily when Warmerdam missed the line with black after being level for quite some time. It was a closed Sicilian where Gukesh knocked down a couple of pawns to force resignation in 34 moves. The youngest world champion is a half point ahead of their nearest rival Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan. Holding the sole third spot is R Praggnanandhaa on 6.5 points after a finely crafted victory over Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia.

Arjun Erigaisi's hunt for an elusive victory continued for the 10th day running as he drew with Vincent Keymer of Germany. P Harikrishna defended a slightly worse rook endgame to hold his fort against top seed Fabiano Caruana of the United States, while Leon Luke Mendonca played out a draw with Anish Giri. Praggnanandhaa came up with a dominating performance against Fedoseev who chose the Tarrasch defense as black. The opening saw Praggnanandhaa getting a structural advantage and he nurtured it quite well in the middle game.

The game was devoid of drama towards the end as Praggnanandhaa sacrificed all his pawns to make a new queen on board. The calculation was perfect and it was all over in 48 moves. —*PTI*

Khawaja hits 200 before Aussie bowlers strike in Galle

GALLE, 30 JAN

Usman Khawaja has played the greatest innings of his Test career to help Australia tighten the screws on Sri Lanka in a series opener fast slipping away from the hosts.

Khawaja (232), milestone man Steve Smith (141), and debutant Josh Inglis (102) feasted in Galle on day two as Australia declared on 6-654, their largest total for any innings on the subcontinent.

Sri Lanka (3-44) then lost three wickets within an hour and could have been four down had substitute fielder Nathan McSweeney held onto Dinesh Chandimal's edge above the slips.

Australia were 610 runs ahead at stumps on Thursday, with Kamindu Mendis (13no) and Chandimal (9no) unbeaten. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

4TH T20I: SAMSON'S WEAKNESS AGAINST RAW PACE IN FOCUS

PUNE, 30 JAN

Sanju Samson's technical weaknesses against express pace along with Rinku Singh's dip in form and fitness issues will be a concern for India when they take on a resurgent England in the fourth T20 International here on Friday.

Having fluffed their chances in the third T20I in Rajkot, the penultimate game of the five-match series gives the hosts another opportunity to seal the series going into the final game in Mumbai on February 2. Suryakumar Yadav's men won the first two games in Kolkata and Chennai.

Samson, the maverick keeper-batter from Kerala, whose sympathetic and loyal fan base never fails to remind everyone of the limited chances he has got, started the T20I season with three hundred against Bangladesh and South Africa before the ongoing series.

In the current rubber, he has had scores of 26, 5, and 3 and it is not these numbers that are concerning. In T20 cricket, if one factor in risk, there would always be a lot of less profitable days at the office considering the kind of strokes batters play these days.

But in the case of Samson, what is of concern is his palpable discomfort against anything bowled above 145 clicks.

Against Bangladesh at home, he faced Taskin Ahmed, and Tanzim Hasan Shakib while in South Africa Andile Simelane and Lutho Sipamla were among the bowlers.

These are not exactly intimidating fast bowlers and he rightfully took them to the cleaners. Match Starts at 7 pm IST. —*PTI*

Ousmane Dembélé completes second career hat trick at right time for PSG

STUTTGART, 30 JAN

Paris Saint-Germain striker Ousmane Dembélé completed the second hat trick of his career Wednesday, and it was good timing for his team.

The France forward achieved the feat in the 54th minute as PSG built a 4-0 lead at Stuttgart in their Champions League game. PSG won the game 4-1 and advanced to the knockout round.

Dembélé scored three goals in succession after Bradley Barcola gave PSG an early lead in the sixth minute.

Dembélé said playing in a No. 9 role has helped him become more decisive.

"As soon as I take the best of a player, I find myself in front of goal," he said after winning the man-of-the-match trophy. "I had the lucidity to score and was also very well assisted by my teammates."

The 27-year-old Dembélé has scored four goals in six Champions League matches this season.

His previous hat trick was in 2016, when as a teenager he netted three goals for Rennes in a 4–1 victory over Nantes in Ligue 1.

PSG got off to a strong start and transformed its dominance into a lead from a corner. Barcola finished off the move with a header at the far post for his second consecutive goal in the tournament from Désiré Doué's clever flick.

Dembélé doubled PSG's lead in the 17th and made it 3-0 in the 35th. According to Opta statistics, PSG had not led 3-0 so quickly in a Champions League match since 2013. After a stuttering campaign marred by three defeats, PSG got back into playoff contention after coming back from 2-0 down to win 4-2 against Manchester City last week. —*PTI*

Man City squeeze into UEFA CL Knockouts

Pep Guardiola said he cannot see Manchester City winning the Champions League in its current form, but believes his side will be better when they face the might of either Real Madrid or Bayern Munich next month. City needed a second-half fightback from 1-0 down to beat Club Brugge 3-1 on Wednesday to avoid crashing out before the knockout stages for the first time since 2012. Their reward could be just a stay of execution against either the defending champions or Guardiola's former club Bayern. —*PTI*

Manoj Kumar retires to take up coaching

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

Former Commonwealth Games gold-winning boxer Manoj Kumar, who dominated the light welterweight (64kg) division in India in his prime, announced his retirement on Thursday to begin a career in coaching.

The 39-year-old won his first and only CWG gold in the 2010 Delhi Games and is also a two-time Asian Championships bronze-medallist. His second and last CWG bronze medal came in the 2018 Gold Coast Games.

He is also a two-time Olympian, having competed in the 2012 London and 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, finishing as a pre-quarterfinalist in both editions. "It's a carefully thought out decision because once I turn 40, I can anyway not compete in amateur events as per international rules. I am retiring as a content man after representing my country to the best of my ability," Manoj, who hails from Kaithal in Haryana, told PTI. "I have just gratitude for the opportunities I got," he added.

The outspoken pugilist, who began his boxing career at the junior level in 1997. —*PTI*

BACK TO DAVIS CUP ACTION

Mukund hurt at India's plight on ranking charts

NEW DELHI, 30 JAN

On his Davis Cup debut, Sasikumar Mukund walked out of the court cramping, wincing in pain, and leaving India down 0-1 against Morocco in September 2023. Not only this, he played wearing a jersey that had India spelled wrong. That was not the end of the nightmarish debut in Lucknow. The AITA was not pleased and sought an explanation for the faux pas.

Worse was to follow. He refused to travel to Pakistan in January, citing a foot injury, and also did not make himself available for the tie against Sweden.

In between, he was banned by AITA on disciplinary grounds when no one had a clue, not even the player that he had been suspended. Captain Rohit Rajpal assured him that he would have the ban lifted if he made himself available for the Sweden match.

However, he had already committed to play on the Tour and also paid advance to his coach. This further complicated the situation, souring his relationship with the national federation.

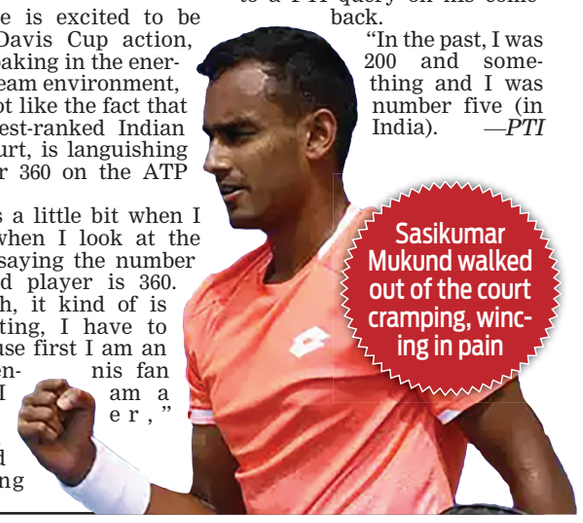
Cut to January 2025, the same Mukund will be India's best-ranked player for the World Group I Play-off tie against Togo, starting Saturday.

But Mukund does not like to call himself the leader of the pack.

While he is excited to be back to Davis Cup action, happily soaking in the energy of the team environment, he does not like the fact that he, the best-ranked Indian on the court, is languishing at number 360 on the ATP chart.

"It hurts a little bit when I read or when I look at the numbers saying the number one-ranked player is 360. This depth, it kind of is disappointing, I have to say, because first I am an Indian tennis fan and then I am a player," Mukund said responding to a PTI query on his comeback.

"In the past, I was 200 and something and I was number five (in India). —*PTI*



Sasikumar Mukund walked out of the court cramping, wincing in pain